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ABSTRACT

This study, the second in a series entitled "Competency across the Campus," was conducted in order to develop accurate data on the job responsibilities of teachers in a university child care center and the competencies these teachers need. The first part of the study used techniques for functional job analysis and content validation to develop information on job duties, skills, and knowledge, and the physical demands made on child care assistant teachers and head teachers. The major part of the study focused on identification of competencies of beginning and advanced teachers. Transcripts of interviews with a sample of 24 teachers from child care centers in higher education in Maine were analyzed to identify competencies. The resulting model distinguished 19 competencies and their behavioral indicators or ways in which the child care teachers displayed the particular competency. Statistical comparisons of beginning and advanced teachers distinguished between basic and optimal skills. Other analyses revealed few statistically significant differences related to level of education or job role as assistant or head teacher. Although the sample was limited to a small segment of the population of child care teachers, these findings are supported by other research in the field. Data tables, job profiles, and the competency model are appended. Twenty-two references are cited. (RH)

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In Safekeeping:

The Child Care Teacher

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Division of Human Resources
University of Southern Maine

Cover Credit: The artwork "Childcare Seasons," housed in the USM Child Care Center, is based on four separate yet related parts representing a day in the life of the center. The work depicts four moments of interaction between the center teachers and the children for whom they are responsible: parents leaving, explaining limits, fantasy and friends. Constructed from black anodized aluminum, the work was created by Roger Richmond.

This study is the second in a series "Competency Across the Campus." The first, conducted in 1984, was a research study of secretarial competencies and looks at the role of the University Secretary.

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In Safekeeping:
A Research Study of Child Care Teacher Competencies

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I would also like to recognize the center directors who gave so generously of their time: Stephen Lehane, Faith McMullen and Jeanne Najemy of USM; Gary Quimby, Donald Hayes, and Jeanne Soule of the University of Maine; Kathy Winey of the University of Maine at Farmington; Joyce Crawford of the University of Maine at Fort Kent; Cindy Gadbois of the University of New England, and Susan Reed of Westbrook College. Special thanks also to the child care teachers who participated in the Behavioral Event Interviews and validation of the job profile data.

Through this study we salute all child care teachers who are entrusted with the safekeeping of our children.

Freda Bernotavicz
Research Study Director

Preface

The concept of competence, as an innovation in worker selection, training, and evaluation, responds to some real and compelling needs. Nowhere are these needs more apparent than in child development programs. The crucial component of programs which nurture and educate young children is qualified staff; it is also their most expensive component. Findings of the National Day Care Study established that staffing patterns (in terms of group size and adult:child ratio) and qualifications (work-related specialized training) were clearly related to positive developmental outcomes for children in center-based programs (Ruopp et al., 1979). Subsequent research warned of the problem of inadequate staff pay, benefits, and status. Now researchers and policy makers note the growing staffing crises as programs with very limited resources and growing demand for their services attempt to recruit and retain qualified staff (Phillips and Whitebook, 1986; Lindsay and Lindsay, 1987).

In an effort to anticipate the crisis and respond to growing staffing needs, in the early 1970's early childhood professionals proposed a competency-based early childhood credential — the Child Development Associate(CDA). This proposal was bold in attempting to confront a number of professional issues at once: the growing demand for services and shortage of qualified staff; the need to validate the abilities of staff from diverse cultural backgrounds who often lacked formal academic credentials; the need to circumvent cost both of training and of salaries for staff with traditional credentials. And, the proposal was naive in seeming to ignore many hurdles: vested interests in existing training programs which favored traditional academic credentials; a recent history of strong opposition to federal regulations and standard setting for early childhood programs; new and relatively untried competence assessment methodologies. But the CDA system was crucial to progress, if for no other reasons than that it took the first steps towards confronting these many issues and problems. The outcomes of this experiment have not been adequately explored, but they are there as lessons for those interested in competency-based approaches to human resource development.

Yet, even if the issues were resolved and the hurdles set aside, there would still be problems with the CDA competence model. To accommodate a variety of work settings and job titles within child care, the CDA system and competence model were, by design, comprehensive and open-ended. Unfortunately, the CDA competence model does not always differentiate between the performer and the work environment. It seems to ask

"What needs to be done in a program that is good for young children?" rather than "What abilities and traits must a person have in order to work effectively with young children?" This is problematic in child care, where the worker must often cope with an inadequate environment, with varying, even conflicting, demands from supervisors, parents, licensing workers, and others, and with his or her own stress and burnout. Assessment of an individual's competence requires an extra inferential step, determining that an observed outcome is due to the individual rather than to the work environment. In addition emphasis on skills makes the CDA competencies context specific, leaving one to wonder whether competence exhibited in work with three-year-olds, for example, would transfer to infant care.

In contrast, the model offered in this report is highly precise and concise. The researchers in Maine, proceeding from the excellent work of McClelland, placed their focus on competence as a set of attributes within the individual. The method of deriving competencies from the experience of successful individuals results in a description of the traits necessary for competent functioning rather than a list of desired outcomes. This removes one inferential step, enabling those who would train for competence to better understand what traits need to be developed. The retrospective approach of the Behavioral Event Interview (BEI) samples from a much larger range of experiences and situations, and distills these into the competencies.

What follows here reads like a textbook chapter on "What is a good early childhood teacher?" and that is what the competency model describes. Yet there are important differences; central among these is the very different process that produced the findings and recommendations. These are not the observations of experts, however well-meaning and sympathetic, looking on from the outside. The heart of the competency model is statements from actual performers about what they do that demonstrates competence. And, there are a few surprises—cognitive skills such as observation and pattern recognition, management competencies such as breadth of perspective. This model also goes much further than most traditional teacher training in encouraging a strong collegial relationship with parents. The model formalizes and defines aspects of competence that may not appear in traditional texts, although both student teachers and their mentors would agree they are crucial to success.

Nearly half of the competencies in the model discriminate between teachers at two levels of competence. Those which do not discriminate seem to validly describe what is minimal and necessary for any teacher of young children. Further work should be done to validate and expand on this model of minimal versus optimal competence. A competence model that describes both what is minimal and what is optimal would support the notion that competence develops and would point to contributors to its development. Such a model would have utility in selecting staff with good potential and in designing staff development appropriate for employees at different levels of competence.

One competency is implicit rather than stated in both the BEI methodology and the CDA assessment process. This is the individual's ability to review, interpret, and report on instances of competent functioning. Early childhood staff are not afforded the time to review and evaluate their performance in any formal or regular way. They are always thinking "on their feet," faced with the immediate and constantly changing demands of young children and their parents (Benham et al., 1988). In spite of this, successful performers do somehow gain a sense of what works and of when they are performing competently. They are able to report and interpret these incidents, stating both what happened and why it was important. According to Robert White's theory, this sense of efficacy and self-awareness motivates the individual toward further efforts at competence. Success breeds success. It is exciting to think about existing and new teacher training methodologies which would develop competence in this sense. Developers of competence definitions and assessment methods should consider further whether this "meta-competence" needs to be made more explicit in their models.

As with the first proposals for the CDA credential, one can hope that this competency model will raise the professional status of child care by giving formal recognition to the skills which may or may not come through formal academic training. The risk is that professionalism will work against collegial staff-parent relationships (Pettygrove and Greenman, 1984). The strength in the competency model proposed here is that it clarifies areas and boundaries of expertise (often in teachers' own words), while emphasizing that a working partnership with parents, as with other staff, is a necessary component of competence.

The project team has wisely limited its study and work to a rather narrowly defined type of child care program and population of child care staff. Additional interesting findings will come as the project is extended to other types of programs and a larger population of early childhood professions. By focusing on staff selection, development, and training (rather than credentialing and training), the model can prove its usefulness and begin to make real contributions to the field. This project has tremendous potential to do both.

Willa Bowman Pettygrove
Davis, California
September, 1988

Summary

As part of a continuing commitment to competency-based human resource management, in 1987 the Division of Human Resources at the University of Southern Maine initiated a research study of child care competencies. Because of the limited research on the effectiveness of child care teachers, the project aimed to develop accurate data on the job responsibilities and the competencies needed in a university child care center.

The first part of the study used techniques for Functional Job Analysis and content validation to develop information on job duties, skills, knowledge, and physical demands of child care assistant teachers and head teachers.

The major part of the study focused on the identification of the competencies of beginning and advanced teachers. Transcripts of interviews with a sample of 24 teachers from child care centers in higher education in Maine were analyzed to identify competencies. The resulting model distinguishes 19 competencies with their behavioral indicators or ways in which the child care teachers displayed the competency.

Statistical comparisons of beginning and advanced teachers distinguished between required or basic skills and optimal skills. Other analyses revealed few statistically significant differences related to level of education or to job role as assistant or head teacher. Although the sample is limited to a small segment of the population of child care teachers, these findings are supported by other research in the field.

By identifying the characteristics needed to be an effective child care teacher, the competency model can serve as a tool for establishing selection criteria, for designing training or supervision protocols, and for performance evaluation.

The child care competency model, derived from the experiences of child care teachers, expands our understanding of the skills, knowledge, and traits of effective child care teachers; it raises critical questions for further exploration; and it provides a basis for an integrated human resource managment system to better serve the caregivers of so many of our nation's children.

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1 Context: Competency-Based Human Resource Management

To promote institutional equity and efficiency, the Division of Human Resources at the University of Southern Maine has, for more than a decade, focused efforts on developing a comprehensive strategy for human resource management. This initiative aims to integrate policies and practices related to the selection, evaluation, promotion, and training of staff. The driving force for this endeavor is a commitment to competency-based models of excellence.

Efforts to define job competencies have traditionally emphasized the tasks required by the job and the skills and knowledge needed for a worker to be effective in that job. This approach provides a basis for understanding the duties of a position and the minimal requirements for functioning in it. The information does not, however, offer a complete picture of effective functioning in a position.

An alternate definition of "competence" as a basic drive for effectiveness was first provided by Robert White (1959). Concurrently, David McClelland and his colleagues were studying the link between human motivation and performance. Attacking so-called general aptitude and intelligence tests for their failure to predict who will do well in particular roles, McClelland (1973) proposed using proven measures of job-related abilities or "competence." In this context, "competency" is any attribute of a person that underlies effective performance. A job competency, therefore, is simply an attribute related to doing a job effectively (Klemp, 1980). A personal attribute can take many forms: a kind of knowledge, an ability, an interest, a trait, a motive, even a self-concept. People have a wide assortment of qualities, but, unless these attributes relate demonstrably to doing well, they are not competencies.

Job competence assessment has been used to identify the characteristics related to outstanding performance in over 100 occupations, including general managers, computer design engineers, college administrators and faculty, creative scientists, Navy Officers, police captains, sales professionals, bankers, and human resource development consultants. All studies follow the same basic steps: (1) select some of the most effective performers; (2) study what these people do that distinguishes them from less effective counterparts; and (3) identify the competencies that account for this difference.

The resulting competency model provides a unifying set of concepts for a system of human resource management that links performance measures, job functions, and personal attributes in a way that works for the individual and the organization. Hiring, training, career path analysis, succession planning, performance appraisal, incentive and compensation systems, and even the design of work, the work environment, and the structure of the organization all derive from the competencies of top performers in critical jobs. A human resource management system using competency models can achieve a high degree of internal consistency.

USM Competency Assessments

In 1983, to tailor current research on competencies to institutional priorities, the Division of Human Resources launched an assessment study of secretarial competencies. The study combined two techniques for generating information on jobs: Functional Job Analysis and Behavioral Event Interviews. The resulting Competency Model for Secretaries was recognized by the College and University Personnel Administration (CUPA) with the 1985 Eastern Region Award for creative and innovative ideas and the 1985 national award for research. Utilization of the model in a competency-based hiring and selection process was one of six innovations nationally recognized at the 1985 CUPA annual convention.

Recently, in response to a growing need, USM has expanded its child care services to approximately 300 infants, toddlers, and preschoolers in a comprehensive program. This program has received several awards, including the National 1987 CUPA Award for Achievement and Creativity and the Martin Luther King Award for Community Service in Portland, Maine. The program was one of twenty-four employer-sponsored programs recognized by the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues in 1988 as being "best on the block" nationally. As the program expands, the need for improved hiring, selection, and assessment of teachers grows. Our experience has demonstrated the benefit of assessing competencies as a way of identifying job candidates with high potential. The indepth screening now conducted by the Division of Human Resources assures that only the best qualified individuals are referred to hiring officers and it results in more accurate person/job match. An assessment of child care teacher competencies was therefore undertaken to meet an important need in the field of child care.

Child Care Teacher Competencies: The State of the Art

The first national initiative focused on child care teachers was launched in 1971 and established the Child Development Associate (CDA) process for competency-based

training, assessment and credentialing of child care workers. As used by the CDA consortium, "competence" refers to work performance which meets a predetermined standard.

A task force of early childhood educators established the competencies which candidates must demonstrate in order to qualify for CDA credentials. Requirements currently specify six general competencies which are broken down into 13 functional areas. More than 13,000 child care providers have received the CDA Credential and 50 percent of the states have incorporated the CDA Credential into their child care licensing requirements. Originally developed for individuals working in center-based programs with three-to five-year-old children, competency assessment systems have since been developed for Home Visitor and Family Day Care Programs. Endorsements on credentials can be provided for Bilingual/Bicultural specialization and for infant, toddler, or preschool care (NCP, 1984).

While this program has grown substantially, it has not had the impact on the child care field that its developers intended. Problems include the difficulty in developing an adequate system for assessing the competencies, the lack of demand for nontraditionally trained teachers, and the lack of universal acceptance of the CDA credentials by state licensing boards and education groups (Steiner, 1976). Oyemade and Chargois (1977) find relatively little data on the relationship between the competencies and child outcomes; they suggest the need for more data on the impact on children before mandating CDA competency criteria for day care staff.

In an extensive review of the literature on staffing characteristics in day care, Oyemade and Chargois (1977) conclude that "despite continuous discussion of the importance of the behavior and characteristics of teachers and caregivers, there is relatively little reliable and valid research evidence concerned with the nature of good teaching or the teacher characteristics which contribute to good teaching." They further note that while the intellectual and technical knowledge of teachers and caregivers can be categorized and measured with some degree of reliability, there is only a limited amount of information about personal and social characteristics of teachers and caregivers. Some attention has been paid to the issue of "style", the unplanned components of role, characteristics such as friendly or unfriendly, warm or cold, intimate or detached, sensitive or insensitive, relaxed or tense, strict or permissive (Beller, 1971). However, substantial evidence indicates that failure to fully consider aspects of style in the selection of staff may hold serious consequences for the development of children (Prescott and Jones 1972; Katz, 1972, Fein and Clarke-Stewart, 1973).

A computer-based search in May 1986 found no generalizable empirical research on the characteristics of effective child care workers, although one study to validate a tool for selecting residential child care workers approaches this goal (Ross and Hoeltke,

1984). Basing the study on the concept that outstanding individuals have configurations of strengths and talents that can provide a valid basis for predicting success, researchers analyzed the thought patterns of outstanding child care workers and identified ten themes. While these themes approach the personal characteristic data called for by Oyemade and Chargois (1977), the study has limited generalizability. The model was developed for workers in residential centers for children with special needs (emotionally disturbed, dependent, neglected, delinquent, or developmentally disabled children); the themes were developed only partially from the workers themselves; and because the selection instrument is proprietary, it cannot be validly administered without extensive and expensive training.

In the field of child care, then, as in many occupations, attention has focused primarily on the job and the skills and knowledge needed to be effective. While this work is an essential basis for understanding the duties and minimal requirements for functioning as a day care worker, a richer and fuller perspective is needed to identify the effective child care teacher. As child care programs enroll increasing numbers of very young children, the quality of personnel becomes a critical issue. A competency assessment promises both a description of effective teacher performance and a tool to integrate human resource management and develop this vital human resource — the caregivers of so many of the nation's children.

2 Approach: The USM Study of Child Care Competencies

The two-pronged study design used at USM to describe effective performance provides comprehensive information on the job and the person in the job. Job analysis identifies the tasks, skill/knowledge requirements, and physical demands of a position; competency identification pinpoints the personal characteristics that distinguish effective performance.

Scope of the Project

While the primary purpose of this project was to improve the data base on child care teachers at USM, in order to improve the generalizability of the findings and to ensure a large enough sample for statistical analysis, the scope of the project was extended to include all child care centers in higher education in the State of Maine. The study, therefore, included the centers in the University of Maine system at Farmington, Fort Kent, Orono (three centers), as well as child care centers at the University of New England and Westbrook College. All centers accepted an invitation to participate in the study. While these are not university lab schools, they do have some characteristics not shared by other child care centers, such as the assistance of work study students and student teacher interns.

Job Analysis

Child care teachers in the University of Maine system currently have two classifications: head teacher is a professional position requiring a four-year degree, and assistant teacher is a classified position under the direction of a head teacher. Several techniques were used to generate information on these classifications, including on-site observation of teachers at work, structured interviews, and analysis of existing job descriptions. To

ensure compatibility of this job data with descriptions used nationally, the CDA competency statements were also utilized. The draft data on the jobs were reviewed by administrators in the USM child care program and then revised and refined.

To ensure content validity of the job profiles, all teachers and administrators in the study were asked to rate them. Task Statements and Physical Demands were each rated (on a five-point scale) according to four factors: 1) Frequency, 2) Time Spent, 3) Importance to Job, and 4) Degree of Supervision. Participants also rated Skills/Knowledge (on a five-point scale) according to four factors: 1) Entry Knowledge or Ability, 2) Differentiates between Performance Levels, 3) Importance in Recruiting, and 4) Need for Training. With separate analyses for assistant and head teachers, the resulting job profiles list tasks in order of priority based on the frequency, time spent, and importance to overall job performance. Knowledge and skills are prioritized in order of their importance at entry, their importance in differentiating between performance levels, and their importance in recruiting. Physical demands and environmental conditions are also listed in priority order. (See Appendices A and B.)

These data on tasks, skills/knowledge, and physical demands have face validity: raters agreed that all were performed or important to job performance. All were rated above three on a five-point scale. Moreover, a striking commonality between ratings for head teachers and assistant teachers suggests that the distinction between the two classifications does not exist in practice. Both groups of personnel have not only essentially the same job requirements, but also the same emphasis on tasks.

Competency Identification

The second task — gathering data on the competencies underlying effective performance as a child care teacher — followed a model used successfully in more than 100 studies here and abroad by McBer and Company, a Boston-based management consulting firm. This approach, which is more empirical than theoretical, consists of three steps: first, identify individuals who are successful in a variety of occupations and professional roles; second, find out what they are doing that makes them successful; and third, examine how and why they are doing what they do (Klemp, 1977). The primary technique used to identify competencies is the Behavioral Event Interview.

Based on a variant of the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954), the Behavioral Event Interview was developed to discover precisely what it is that effective individuals do in specific job situations, and then to consider these data as evidence of competencies that distinguish effective from less effective performance. The Behavioral Event Interview is not a measure, but simply a means of gathering information about a person's

experience. The goal of the process is to get the individual talking in as much detail as possible about specific experiences on the job. To do this, the interviewer asks respondents to identify "high" and "low" points in the job being studied. Each interviewee is then asked to describe the events that led up to each situation; the other people involved; what the interviewee felt, thought, said and did; and the outcomes or results. In this way, the thoughts, feelings, and actions demonstrated by the individual are documented in the context of situational demands (Klemp, 1982).

One of the major strengths of the Behavioral Event Interview is that it uncovers the thoughts and feelings involved in behavior, not simply what can be observed directly. The technique is therefore superior to observation, since it identifies motives, values, and thought processes. In this way, it provides information which complements data such as the task analysis data which focuses on observable behaviors.

Sample Selection

This approach to competency identification examines superior performers and contrasts them with a control group of average-performing peers. In this study three broad criteria for superior performance were established: excellent teaching skills, excellent rapport with children and families, and general reputation as an outstanding child care teacher. A letter describing the project and listing these criteria requested participating child care center staff to nominate teachers who represented the best practice and those who had not yet achieved optimum performance. Respondents were asked not to nominate individuals who were experiencing performance problems and to include only those people whom they had observed working with children. From the responses a representative sample was selected to include advanced and beginning teachers, head and assistant teachers, and the three age-groups of children — infant, toddler, and preschool. (See Table 1.)

The Behavioral Event Interview

To minimize bias, interviewers were not informed of the nomination rating of the interviewees as beginning or advanced teachers. In contacting their assigned subjects, each interviewer described the project and invited participation in a two-hour, taped interview focusing on day care teaching experience. Each individual was assured of confidentiality.

Table 1

Breakdown of Sample

Education / Rating	2 yrs. college and less	4 yrs. college and more	Total
Advanced	2	10	12
Beginning	4	8	12
Total	6	18	24

Years of Education

Rank / Rating	Head Teacher	Assistant Teacher	Total
Advanced	8	4	12
Beginning	3	9	12
Total	11	13	24

Rank

Age Level / Rating	Infant (0-18 mos.)	Toddler (18 mo.-3 yrs.)	Preschool (3-5 yrs.)	Total
Advanced	3	3	6	12
Beginning	3	6	3	12
Total	6	9	9	24

Age Group of Children

The first ten minutes of the interview aimed to set the interviewee at ease, to gather background information, and to identify the major responsibilities of the job. The major portion of the interview engaged the interviewee in describing high points and low points in day care teaching. Each interview covered at least two high points and two low points. To preserve confidentiality, tapes were transcribed by an external firm.

Development of the Competency Model

In constructing the initial competency model, team members traded transcriptions to broaden their perspectives by exposure to a wider range of interviews. Team members independently analyzed the assigned set of interviews, listing names, page numbers, and a brief description of thoughts and actions. In this way, each person developed a listing of emerging themes or recurrent behaviors.

In an intensive two-day "concept formation session" led by the project consultant, the team generated a listing of behavioral indicators and then grouped these indicators into categories of competencies. The competencies included kinds of knowledge, type of skills, motives, values, or other personal characteristics.

At the beginning of this session, the project team developed the final rating of advanced or beginning teacher in the sample. This rating was based upon three factors: nomination of the person through the agreed-upon process; assessment of the interviewer; assessment of the transcript analyst (a different member of the project team).

All interviews were then coded in accordance with the model. To ensure consistency, this part of the process was conducted by only two members of the project team. They read each interview, noting every instance of a behavior which matched the model, and transferred these data to coding sheets. The sums of the competencies and behavioral indicators were submitted to statistical analyses to determine significant differentiations among the groups.

The methodology for competency identification, therefore, drew on the experiences, the understandings, and the insight of practitioners to delineate the characteristics of effective performance among child care teachers.

3 Findings: Identification of Competencies

Analysis of the thoughts and behaviors of child care teachers in centers in higher education in Maine produced a set of 19 competencies. The competency model is shown on the following page (Table 2). Twelve competencies were designated "required," because they were displayed with approximately equal frequency by both the advanced teachers and the beginning group. The remaining seven competencies were designated "optimal," because they were displayed with higher frequency, at a statistically significant level, by the group of advanced teachers. The required competencies underlie acceptable performance; the optimal competencies contribute to excellent performance. The complete model is attached as Appendix C.

The 19 competencies have been organized into six clusters:

Early Childhood Educational Competencies.
Cognitive Skills
Management Competencies
Self-Management Competencies
Achievement Competencies
Interpersonal Competencies

The following descriptions of each competency, with examples of behavior selected from the interview transcripts, do not describe any single person; they simply illustrate a range of behavior exhibited by teachers in the sample that demonstrates each competency.

Table 2

Child Care Teacher Competencies

Early Childhood Educational Competencies

Skill in creating a psychologically safe, secure environment
Skill in classroom control and discipline
Skill in providing stimulation for children
Skill in communicating with young children

Cognitive Competencies

Observational skill
Pattern recognition
Diagnostic skill

Management Competencies

Breadth of perspective
Program management
Building cooperative professional relationships
Building trust and rapport with families

Self-Management Competencies

Ability to maintain own equilibrium
Setting limits and boundaries
Self-development

Achievement Competencies

Initiative
Job Commitment
Self-confidence

Interpersonal Competencies

Empathy
Nonverbal understanding

Early Childhood Educational Competencies

SKILL IN CREATING A PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE, SECURE ENVIRONMENT
SKILL IN CLASSROOM CONTROL AND DISCIPLINE
SKILL IN PROVIDING STIMULATION FOR CHILDREN
SKILL IN COMMUNICATING WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

The four early childhood educational competencies are grounded upon basic knowledge of early childhood development. For example, teachers need to know what constitutes a safety hazard or a threat to security for the age group of the children in their care. Understanding the children's physical, emotional, and cognitive developmental stages is needed to make such determinations. A piece of equipment on the playground may represent a hazard for children whose motor skills, such as balance, are not sufficiently developed. Or a way of maintaining classroom control that works for first graders may be totally inappropriate for preschoolers.

The key judgment involved in these four skills is "appropriateness," and the standard of measure is knowledge of early childhood development. While the remaining 15 competencies would serve child care teachers well in almost any job, the four educational competencies are the specialized, technical competencies of the early childhood teacher. These skills would transfer to other teaching levels, but the knowledge of human development would need expansion beyond early childhood.

The first competency, Skill in Creating a Psychologically Safe, Secure Environment, was demonstrated significantly more often by advanced than by beginning teachers. This statistically significant difference suggests that the competency must be mastered before overall excellence of performance can be achieved.

There was no statistically significant difference in the frequency with which the remaining three competencies were demonstrated by beginning and advanced teachers. This suggests that Classroom Control and Discipline, Providing Stimulation for Children, and Communicating with Young Children are basic requirements for doing an acceptable job as a child care teacher.

The following discussions of the competencies draw on data from the study interviews.

1. SKILL IN CREATING A PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE, SECURE ENVIRONMENT

Definition: ***Understanding what children need to feel safe and secure and applying this knowledge in practice (in policies, procedures, demeanor). This competency presupposes a general understanding of developmental stages in early childhood.***

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Stresses the need for children to have high self-esteem

b) Understands the impact circumstances and the physical environment can have on children and others

c) Organizes and structures the classroom to reduce stress on the adults and children

d) Provides routines and rituals to promote children's emotional health and sense of well-being

e) Introduces children to new things gradually so that they are not fearful

f) Presents new things to children in ways that appeal to them

g) Makes sure that children who are distressed receive support and attention

Discussion:

Whether they came by the knowledge through personal observations or in their formal education, effective child care teachers agree with Maslow's belief that basic safety and security needs must be met before children's full attention can be focused on learning beyond elementary survival tactics. To feel secure, children must feel respected and liked; they must have high self-esteem. Effective child care teachers keep the child's need for self-esteem foremost in mind. In guarding children's self-esteem, they are particularly careful not to allow children to undergo experiences where they fail.

In the following example, an advanced teacher comments on a mistake made by a novice teacher:

> She was doing the little red hen and she wanted the children to dramatize it. I didn't think that was appropriate for that group of children. They weren't quite ready to dramatize. I'm very aware of self-concept in children, and when I saw her with four children up there and one little girl, so shy, she held her head down and then the student teacher invited another child to take her place, and just to see that child shrivel. The closest I ever come to anger is when I see a child downed like that with an inappropriate activity.

Cleverness in structuring the environment plays a large role in promoting a sense of security. Reducing noise at nap time, efficient room design, "preventive" seating arrangements, getting children immediately engaged in activities when they arrive at school are but some of the ways stress is reduced for children and adults.

There is also considerable art in ensuring that children feel secure while at the same time challenging them to move beyond the narrow bounds of the familiar. Routines and rituals satisfy children's needs for the familiar. For children in certain developmental stages, it may be telling the same story the exact same way time and time again, playing the same music at nap time every day, setting up and serving food in the same manner each day — very simple rituals that children await daily and feel comforted to see "still there."

Moving children beyond the familiar without undermining their sense of security requires skill and patience. It took one teacher six months to move her "hip mushroom" — as she referred to the frail, tiny girl who insisted on being carried about — out into play activities that required some physical prowess and maneuvering with other children.

Other than entering day care in the first place, the biggest change the children face is transition to the next level. This usually means a new teacher, new room, and new classmates. It can be a traumatic experience for the child or an interesting adventure, depending on the teachers' skill. In bringing a child from another group in the center into his group, a teacher assured a smooth, happy transition for the child:

> I took the child around to all of his former teachers in the room and said, "Say goodbye to them. You're going to move. You're graduating. You're going to come to my room." I took the time till he had a chance to say bye to all the teachers, give them hugs and kisses, say goodbye to all the kids. I said, "Okay, I'm going to bring you into my room." I brought him in, gave him a cubby, introduced him to the teachers, tried to make him feel good, and he came in and sat down.

Presenting new things to children in ways that appeal to them can require charm and "hardship duty," as in the case of a child with severe allergies restricted to a very limited, bland diet:

> When one child can't have what the other children are having, and you can plainly see everything on the tables, it makes the child very unhappy. So, I gave that child puffed rice and milk for his snack. And I ate puffed rice and milk also. And I explained "I can't eat some things because they make me sick, and John can't eat some things either, and so we are both going to have this special snack together." I was trying to make the child not feel so alienated that he's the only one who can't eat just anything.

Despite the best efforts of teachers to prevent stress and distress, children occasionally have emotional upsets. A teacher too busy to comfort a child sees to it that another teacher whom the child trusts helps the child.

The direct outcome of mastery of this competency is children who feel secure enough to exercise some independence, try new things, and quickly regain their equilibrium when minor upsets occur for them.

2. SKILL IN CLASSROOM CONTROL AND DISCIPLINE

Definition: *Understanding what behaviors adversely affect children and disrupt group harmony. Includes practical knowledge of what to do and say to redirect children's energy into constructive activities and more appropriate modes of expression. This competency presupposes a general understanding of developmental stages in early childhood.*

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Sets rules for children; lets them know what is expected; reminds them as necessary

b) Explains consequences of actions to children — what will happen if they do x, y, or z

c) Understands the strategies children use to manipulate others

d) Obtains compliance by telling children what to do rather than what not to do

e) Obtains compliance by narrowing children's options or range of choices in decision making

f) Orients children's attention away from inappropriate behavior towards more appropriate behavior

g) Enlists the cooperation of children in dealing with issues and problems in the group

h) Works with children to help them verbalize and express their feelings appropriately

i) Shows approval; reinforces appropriate behavior

Discussion:

Much of the job of assuring that children do not get hurt emotionally or physically is keeping control of the classroom. Careful structuring of activities and interactions serves as the proverbial and all-important "ounce of prevention." Nevertheless, some problems

will inevitably emerge and they must be handled as they occur. Skillful disciplinary practices help children to gain control over their impulses and to express themselves in ways that do not alienate the adults and children around them. Beyond preventing harm, classroom control and discipline assures "time on task" — tasks that help children grow in self-esteem and prowess.

The basis for maintaining discipline is letting children know the rules and reminding them of the rules as often as needed until they are learned. "No hitting; no kicking; no toy weapons; no saying mean things to hurt people's feelings; no throwing food" are but a few of the rules we encountered. They were simple rules, stated clearly and unambiguously in language the children understood:

> I talked to the child about the fact that he had hurt Judy, because he had. He'd hit her. I said, "It's not okay to do that. You don't hit children. You don't hit teachers. You don't hit anyone. That's not okay to do."

Children are also notified of what the consequences will be should they break the rules again:

> "You know you are not allowed to walk around the room during nap time, and if you try that the work study people may be angry, and that's because of something you did. When I come back, if you're in the middle of a tantrum, I'm going to let them (work study people) handle it. I'm not going to get involved." So that's what happened. I came back and she was in the middle of a tantrum and I just walked away. The work study teacher got her calmed down.

It took weeks of stating consequences and carrying through before the problem was solved because the child had been effectively using the strategy of tantrums to manipulate the people around her. Effective child care teachers recognize manipulative strategies. When the strategies are self-defeating or harmful to others, the teachers help the children develop more appropriate modes of expression.

The strategies routinely used by effective teachers to obtain the compliance of the children were: telling them what to do rather than what not to do; limiting their choices; and distracting them from unacceptable behavior.

Describing how she had helped a work study student overcome a discipline problem with a boy, a teacher observed:

> It was just a constant tug-of-war between them, the child saying "'Yes, I'm going to do it," and her saying "No, you can't do it." So we talked about ways she could separate herself from the power struggle, how she

could provide Jimmy with a couple of options by saying "You can either do this or you can do that." And then it's no longer so emotionally charged.

The children themselves can help to encourage appropriate behavior:

I like to have all of the children act as a support system and audience for encouraging their peers, so they aren't always looking to an adult for that. That's one of the reasons our potty program is so successful. The children encourage each other. Each child gets lots of applause from peers for their achievements.

Finally, in matters of discipline, one of a teacher's most powerful tools is positive reinforcement —"catching children doing something right," and letting them know teacher noticed.

Learning to maintain classroom control without the use of physical or psychological force is a basic competency teachers must master to set the stage for progress in other domains of children's development.

3. SKILL IN PROVIDING STIMULATION FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

Definition: *Practical knowledge about how to capture the interest and attention of young children and artful execution of these ideas. Includes attention to and adjustments for individual or group differences. Attention is paid to physical as well as intellectual and emotional stimulation. Activities may be adapted from other sources or originally created by the teacher. This competency assumes a general understanding of developmental stages in early childhood.*

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Introduces children to new things; expands their horizons (new food, other cultures, etc.)

b) Assures that there is sufficient variety in activities to hold children's attention. (This is balanced with the provision of routines that promote a sense of stability and security.)

c) Provides physically stimulating activities for children

d) Creates opportunities for children to be creative and expressive

e) Makes special efforts on behalf of the children (special celebrations; special materials; etc.)

Discussion:

Effective child care teachers are "show people" of sorts, able to capture children's attention and imagination. The primary goal is the children's development, yet the greater the teacher's artfulness, the less aware children are that they are learning. To the children it is play as opposed to work. Achieving this effect takes skill, creativity, and careful preparation on the teacher's part. Yet on stage, teachers, like the children, can forget they are working. Many teachers admitted to having as much fun as the children.

Teachers avoid boring themselves and the children by introducing new things and by sufficient variety in daily routines. Always, however, the children's sense of security is taken into account — not too new, not too fast, etc. It is a balancing act.

Since food is part of the daily routine of the centers, teachers often take advantage of this to introduce children to new eating experiences — an unfamiliar fruit or vegetable, a different food combination, a different custom around food. One teacher described teaching infants to eat with a spoon:

> One day we decided it was time to get the babies feeding themselves with a spoon. It was hilarious. There was food everywhere but in their mouths. A few days later, we were sitting there and looked at the babies and realized they were doing it! Eating with their spoons without a big mess. It was so great!

Teachers found new music, new neighborhoods to explore, introductions to other cultures. They attended to physical as well as intellectual and emotional development with indoor and outdoor physical activities — dancing, jumping, running.

Dance or art work provided opportunities for children to be expressive and creative:

> Sometimes I provide materials for the children and let them do with them as they wish, not providing examples, not showing them a sample that they need to make theirs look like exactly. I just put out the paint and paper, scissors, glue, whatever. I want them to get involved in the process of creating what they want.

Special celebrations — birthdays, holidays, or that particular favorite, Halloween — often set the stage for creativity and expression. Effective teachers "make it all happen."

4. SKILL IN COMMUNICATING WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Definition: *The ability to use multiple modes of expression to get one's point across to young children, and the ability to develop children's communication skills. This competency presupposes a general understanding of developmental stages in early childhood, especially understanding of how language and cognitive skills develop in early childhood.*

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Assures that explanations, rules, etc. given to children are at their level of understanding and not too complex

b) Makes a special effort to be highly verbal with children as a developmental strategy

c) Uses dramatic techniques and other creative approaches to get a point across

d) Uses voice modulation and body language to set a particular mood (calm, excitement, etc.)

e) Uses gestures and sign language to reinforce verbal messages

f) Models the behavior expected from the child

Discussion:

Getting one's point across to young children requires tailoring communications to their level of understanding. Their facility with language, their cognitive skills, and their ability to cope with choices are all limited. The teacher in an earlier example, who suggested to a work study student that she give the child two options, went on to explain that three options would be too many for a child at that age to remember.

Teachers made a special effort to be highly verbal with the children, to the point of chronicling the obvious. To a person unaccustomed to language development methodology in early childhood teaching, the litany may seem monotonous. But the children soon begin to use the words:

> One little guy had put on a red devil outfit, and he has red hair and freckles. It really suited him. As he was putting on the costume, we were talking about putting it on, putting your feet in, legs in, pulling it up. He put his arms in and I said, "I have to zip you up now because the zipper is in the back." Then we started talking about the costume itself. "What color is it?" and he said, "Red." I said, "What's this?" and he said, "It's a tail." He didn't know what the horns were called. I explained that they were horns....

Some children, because of shyness or perhaps a lack of verbal stimulation at home, need special help. In the case of one child who insisted on merely gesturing to convey his needs, a teacher consistently pointed out to the child what he should say. The teacher would then wait for the correct words before responding to the child's request. Within a few months, the child's problem was overcome.

Drama, voice modulation and gestures all serve the teachers in communicating with the children. In working with a group of aggressive children, one teacher used puppets:

> The first puppet was playing with some blocks. The second puppet came in, and I had him think out loud: "I want to play, so I'm going to go over and just take some of those toys." So, he went over and grabbed some of the blocks and the puppets ended up fighting. And both puppets got hurt and began to cry. And the first puppet said, "I don't like it when you grab my toys." The second puppet said, "They're not your toys, they belong to the school, and I wanted to play with you." The first puppet said, "I wanted to play with you too, but I don't want to be hit." So they decided to try a new way. The second puppet went away, and the first puppet was playing alone again. And the second puppet came up and said, "Can I play with you?" And so they played together nicely, and both puppets said how much more fun it was to play nicely than to fight over the toys.

Voice modulation, another aspect of drama, was frequently used in storytelling and to create a mood such as excitement or calm:

> He was grieving for his mom, and he was really upset that she'd gone home and left him here. I just knew that we had to bring him up to a level where he trusted us and could transfer some of his dependence on his mom to us. I just used my nice, calm low-toned voice. That seems to reassure both children and adults.

Finally, children usually view what the teacher does as acceptable or desirable behavior. Being on stage continually as a role model can be challenging, especially when one is called on to handle snakes and worms without whimpering:

> I tend to be a calm, moderate person, and I've heard parents say that, "Oh, you're so calm in talking to the children." And I find that it's very soothing to both children and parents if you can maintain that. And it applies even to little things like handling snakes or worms. You have to have a certain calmness, because the children will model what you do.

Effective teachers go about their tasks with a sharp awareness that they serve as role models for the children — and their parents.

Cognitive Competencies

OBSERVATIONAL SKILL
PATTERN RECOGNITION
DIAGNOSTIC SKILL

Effective child care teachers move through their world as students of the scene — collecting, interpreting, and analyzing information. Three characteristics enable them to meet the intellectual requirements of the job: observational skills, pattern recognition, and diagnostic skills.

These three cognitive competencies were shown at a high degree of frequency by both beginning and advanced teachers, suggesting that they are essential and basic competencies for the job.

5. OBSERVATIONAL SKILL

Definition: *The ability to focus one's attention on transactions in the environment and to recall details of these observations. The activity may be conscious scanning or subconscious awareness. The latter talent for focusing on a matter at hand while subconsciously monitoring the environment for signs of trouble has led some to say that good teachers have "eyes in the back of their head." In contemporary literature, good teachers are said to be "with it."*

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Continuously monitors the environment; alert to signs of trouble
b) Observes individual children to identify their unique characteristics (such as preferences in toys, food, people)
c) Observes adults/teachers in interaction with children to determine what is effective and what is not
d) Observes the impact a child or group of children is having on others

Discussion:

In the creative confusion which often exists in a child care classroom, the teacher needs to be constantly vigilant — alert to cues from the children. They may be getting restive or bored with an activity and need to be moved on to something else. They may reach that fine line between creative confusion and disorder when action must be taken:

> You have to be aware of when the play is starting to deteriorate from constructive to destructive play, when they start kind of wandering over to the toys, and start pulling off the toys, or wandering off into an opposite direction from the rest of us. By listening to what the child has to say and just sensing that it's time for a change.

Following the motto "Just simply keep your eyes open," the teacher tracks a child with behavioral problems who needs watching or an infant transitioning into the toddler room who may find the play too rough or demanding. An acute awareness of each child as unique fosters a keen observation of each one's individual character — whether the child is aggressive, disruptive, stoic, or attention getting; how a particular child uses his right hand to catch a baseball and his left to write numbers; how one little girl tends to stick like Velcro to the teacher and need special attention especially when she is not feeling well.

The child care teacher notes specific details about individual children's behavior:

> He came in as a three-year-old and wanted just to be held and held a blanket and didn't relate much to anyone. It was very difficult for him to separate from his mother. And I watched him like to draw and he began to make scribbles all over the paper, constantly, all the time; and he had all the markers and paper, and that was the first thing he would do. He couldn't relate to other children as well; he wanted to just be alone and he would like to color. And I saw the scribbles and markers eventually take form and he was able to draw just about anything. And that's what he did for the longest period of time, was to draw in detail, with a lot of detail.

The teacher is also keenly aware of how children impact on the group. Sometimes an individual child will affect the others in a positive or negative way:

> He tends to be tough and when he comes in the morning, he walks around and purposely bumps into toddlers. He's always pushing around another child. Sometimes he'll be outside, and he gets all wound up, and he really will go up to somebody and just, boom, push them down, pull their hair, just be really rough.

At other times, groups of children need to be watched and evaluated for their effect on other groups:

> There were a couple of kids who were ring leaders that the other kids would imitate, and those children often knew exactly what irritated the teachers and would do it on purpose — to irritate them, and would push to

see how far they could go with the rules. And there were other children that would follow them and imitate them. Also some of these children interacted with each other negatively. Since they were both such strong personalities and wanted to be leader, there would be fights which often got physical, or they would spit at each other.

With "eyes in the back of his or her head," the child care teacher is constantly alert to cues in the environment.

6. PATTERN RECOGNITION

Definition: ***Pattern recognition is the ability to make several discrete observations, recognize their interconnectedness, and correctly label the pattern. The ability to spot departures from typical patterns is also involved. For child care teachers, the content of pattern recognition is primarily human behavior and situations relating to child care.***

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Identifies trends or patterns in behavior over time

b) Notices discrepancies or departures from typical behavioral patterns

c) Detects similarities between past and present situations

Discussion:

Creating order and making sense of the "buzzing confusion" of daily existence is an essential human skill. Identifying patterns in behavior, detecting similarities or discrepancies between the present situation and something that happened in the past are all important skills in managing the hustle and bustle of a child care center. Recognizing patterns makes it possible to accurately label and store information about behavior, to predict what is likely to happen next, and, thus, to build a repertoire of effective interventions.

Some patterns are apparent in relationships with parents because of different styles of parents and their impact on teachers and children. Some, for example, may be over-protective parents. But behaviors may change as parents become more comfortable with entrusting their child to the center or as a mother learns for the first time how to play by joining classroom activities.

Individual children provide clues to what is going on with them — a little boy takes his bottle less when he is getting sick; a passive little girl becomes aggressive when she goes to the toddler room, or a boy becomes easier to deal with as he gets used to being in the center.

At each child care center, the rhythms of the day and the year all impact on the children and the people who work there. Teachers recognize these rhythms and patterns — how the noise seems to bounce off the walls on rainy days; the honeymoon period which seems to occur for a month at the beginning of the school year. They also recognize the effects that being in a center can have on children:

> We've found that younger children seem to be more overwhelmed with the center view because we don't have small individual classes and the space is open and free flowing.

Familiarity with a child's usual behavior makes it possible to flag departures from the typical pattern — a normally docile child throws a temper tantrum; a happy, active boy seems lethargic and starts sleeping on the floor; or a boy who normally spends forty minutes in the block-building area starts flitting from activity to activity.

Effective work with a child may spur new patterns of behavior:

> I knew that I was doing good things with the child and the child was reacting totally differently with me than he was with that teacher. And I wasn't the only one who noticed it. Every other staff member noticed it and spoke to me about it. The child changed right away. He came in, had lunch, did not like the juice, said, "I don't like this juice," and moved it to the side so it wouldn't be near him. Once he used to throw the juice across the table, glass and all.

Drawing on experience, the child care teacher detects similarities between the current situation and events of the past. When a child appears low and the parents suggest taking him to the doctor, the teacher recognizes that the behavior could simply be the result of constipation; when parents are concerned about the behavior of their aggressive son, the teacher notes that it sometimes works to move such children into an older group where their behavior might improve.

7. DIAGNOSTIC SKILL

Definition: *The ability to evaluate observational data using frameworks relating to the norms and practices of early childhood development and to identify appropriate developmental strategies.*

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Assesses each child's status against developmental norms

b) Observes children over time to assess their progress towards developmental goals

c) Assures that materials and methods are developmentally appropriate for individual children and the group

d) Develops specific strategies to meet special individual needs of children (cognitive, affective, and physical)

e) Accurately labels observed behavioral patterns

f) Identifies causes for behavior, particularly atypical or abnormal behavior

g) Accurately predicts children's future behavior from interpretations of past behavior

h) Learns from concrete experience with children what works to help them

Discussion:

The child care teacher is a problem solver, constantly assessing and analyzing information about the children in relation to norms or standards of early childhood development and making appropriate responses. After a thorough initial assessment of each child's status against development norms, progress can be constantly monitored by detailed observations of the child's behavior:

> He was at the playground with the children having free play. He had two toys, a shovel and a rake, and they're not allowed to have two. Well, the first child would come up and ask for it and attempt to grab it and that child would hit, would forcefully hit, kick or bite. No talking, no nothing. He would just grab onto it, whichever way he could. He did not want to listen to anything. Those were his toys. He was going to have them as long as he wanted to and he just was very, very angry and I could not understand why with so much anger for that age and that child. Had it been any other child it would have been understandable but he was an older child and his abilities seemed that he could handle it better.

Constant vigilance reveals where things stand: a shy child may become more outgoing; an uncommunicative child may talk more; an aggressive child may be learning more appropriate behavior:

> I've seen a big reduction in his anger, his physical outbursts, his ability to handle situations verbally rather than physically. Not to say that it's been all rosy. He's had times where he's had another outburst, and thrown his sneaker or a fork. But it's not nearly as bad.

To make both the materials and methods developmentally appropriate for the children, teachers constantly evaluate, adapt, and build on opportunities. A dress-up Halloween party, for example, may help children distinguish between the person and the mask. Recognizing the needs of younger children, the teacher may turn a carpentry area into a quiet area for toddlers to go and just cuddle with a toy on some pillows; they may reduce time on projects or cut down on the number of choices for activities.

In dealing with the individual children, the child with a behavioral problem, food allergy, the clinging child or the one who is withdrawn, the teacher creatively identifies specific techniques to meet the child's needs.

Management Competencies

BREADTH OF PERSPECTIVE
PROGRAM MANAGEMENT
BUILDING COOPERATIVE PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS
BUILDING TRUST AND RAPPORT WITH FAMILIES

In observing teachers caring for young children, their management role is not obvious. These skills, therefore, can easily be overlooked in training child care teachers and in formulating their official job descriptions.

Three management competencies were demonstrated significantly more frequently by advanced teachers than by beginning teachers: Breadth of Perspective, Program Management, and Building Cooperative Professional Relationships. This statistically significant difference suggests that these three competencies must be mastered before overall excellence of performance can be attained.

Building Trust and Rapport with Families was shown as frequently by beginning as advanced teachers, suggesting that it is a basic requirement for acceptable performance.

8. BREADTH OF PERSPECTIVE

Definition: ***The ability to detach oneself from the present situation in order to evaluate it, bringing into account the long term and broader context of issues.***

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Views issues and problems in the context of the big picture or broader picture

b) Has a long-term perspective on the child; is concerned that what he/she and others do will serve the child well over time

Discussion:

To make sound decisions about the program and what is best for the children, a teacher's perspective must encompass the world beyond the center and the future beyond the next few months. In making decisions about children, teachers stress the importance of taking all relevant factors into account. In a situation involving a child with a history of physical and emotional problems, a teacher who took the whole of the situation into consideration commented on a work-study teacher who did not:

> Her son could do it. So she feels all children can. Her son loves it, so all children are going to love it. It's just sort of tunnel vision on her part. It simply was not appropriate for this boy, and I had to tell her that. I get concerned when I see things like that happening — people imposing things without any understanding of the total picture and the child's feelings.

In thinking of the big picture, teachers also show a concern for the children's future once they have left the center. In many cases, it is a lens through which they view decisions such as what to emphasize with a child or the group. In the case of a child with special needs, concern for the child's future led a teacher to work with a committee to assure that they had all the necessary information to make a good decision about the boy's placement:

> It was a feeling of real support from the system when they said we want to have this meeting and your opinions do count, and what you have to say

about what you've learned from dealing with this child for two years is important to us. And I hope we did get the best placement for Jimmy.

The key question for the teacher is: what will serve the children best in the long run?

9. PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

Definition: *Taking responsibility for the direction of the child care program, including coaching of other teachers*

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Does detailed planning with the team (co-teachers) and assures consistency and coordination

b) Provides specific feedback to other teachers to correct a problem

c) Provides instruction to other teachers on what to do to improve their effectiveness

d) Does things to enhance the professional development of other teachers

Discussion:

Head teachers and regular teachers who are assigned student teachers to assist them take responsibility for the team's direction. Planning activities is an ongoing occurrence throughout the year:

> My co-teacher, our student helper and I try to have a staff meeting every Monday for about an hour, which is really not nearly enough time. So at this meeting, we looked at the calendar and decided, Halloween's coming up and there's lots of things you can do with Halloween. We sat down and talked about what we wanted to do every day and how that fit in with our long-term plan.

Careful planning also occurs around individual children needing special attention. Work study and substitute teachers must also be oriented, and their plans must be reviewed for appropriateness. Since it is difficult to find times when all the teachers can sit down together, much of the planning and coordination that occurs happens informally, or as one teacher put it, "on the fly."

Responsibility for supervising other teachers may be formal, as it is when there is a lead or head teacher. It is unofficial and informal in the case of assistant teachers supervising work study teachers. Sometimes the problem to be addressed relates to tensions between the teachers:

> I realized that the reason she rubbed the co-teacher the wrong way was not what she said, but the way she said it. So I talked to her. I explained that I felt it was her tone of voice that was the problem. She was a bit surprised and said she'd be more careful in the future. And that worked out well.

At other times, the problem can stem from the way the teachers are doing their job and the solution is for someone to take supervisory responsibility for a broader view:

> We were having a problem with aggression and toddlers biting one another. I noticed these incidents were occurring at transition times between activities, and diapering and potty time were taking too long. So, I had to give frequent reminders to people. I think a lot of what I do is just kind of looking at details. I go in and I look at the workings of the room and I see what little nudge is needed to keep the whole daily routine from becoming chaotic and frustrating for ourselves and the children. Little things that need to be done like making sure the appearance of the room is good. Just reminding people of things, because it's so easy to forget.

Work with student or beginning teachers calls for an ongoing process whereby more experienced teachers share their knowledge of what works to correct problems. Head or lead teachers also attempt to help the teachers they supervise upgrade their skills through outside activities such as conferences or visits to other centers for an exchange of ideas.

10. BUILDING COOPERATIVE PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Definition: *Assuring that the knowledge and assistance of multiple professional resources are brought to bear in helping children. Includes offering one's own knowledge and assistance to other professionals and informing or involving management personnel, as appropriate.*

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Offers help and support to fellow teachers

b) Values insights and suggestions of team members and other professionals

c) Provides information to and values dialogue with other professionals who are working with the children for other purposes (such as speech therapists; psychologists)

d) Keeps supervisor informed of important developments

Discussion:

Teamwork is critical among the teachers working within a group. Quarters are close and the pace can be hectic at times. Meetings and illnesses can occasionally result in short staffing, so a cooperative attitude and willingness to pitch in and help one another is important. One kindly teacher lifted all the heavy babies during the last month of her co-teacher's pregnancy. Another teacher came in early for several weeks to relieve some of the burden from a teacher who worked with another age group.

Teamwork and cooperation are also enhanced when there is mutual respect among the teachers and other professionals that come in contact with the children. Within the group, assuring high morale means listening to everyone's ideas and not monopolizing the menu of activities. Effective teachers were particularly careful to solicit the ideas of work study teachers.

Concern to help children and the desire to develop their own skills led teachers into mutually beneficial dialogue with other professionals, such as speech therapists and psychologists:

> I was very pleased to have a chance to meet with the speech therapist working with Joey. I explained what I have been doing to try to help Joey; what I think Joey is capable of doing; what I've seen him accomplish. And he told me what he's trying to do. He went over all the things he noticed, in case I hadn't. And so, we're working together on that.

Managing the classroom is the responsibility of the teachers, but situations arise where it is critical that the center's management be informed or involved as part of the team. Because the center's managers are ordinarily experienced professionals, they are most often called in by the teachers for professional advice on the best way to handle difficult situations.

11. BUILDING TRUST AND RAPPORT WITH FAMILIES

Definition: *Respecting the needs of families for information, a sense of security about their child's care, and decision-making authority in important matters affecting their children. Includes treating family members as primary sources of information about the child.*

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Values parents' expertise; asks them for information and advice

b) Consults with parents to work out mutually agreeable goals for children

c) Finds out about children's home life and takes this information into account in planning and decision-making

d) Complies with parents' preferences for dealing with children; makes compromises when needed

e) Invites family members to share their concerns about the children

f) Calls special problems to the attention of parents, and refers parents to other professional resources as needed

g) Shares with parents specific suggestions on how they can help their children

h) Establishes ongoing communications with parents

Discussion:

In addition to the importance of the teachers' relationship with the children and other professionals is the quality of the relationship forged with the children's families. In most cases contact is only with the children's parents, but occasionally grandparents or other family members become involved.

Often the first step in building trust and rapport with families is valuing what they can contribute to planning and decision-making for their children:

> I said to the father, "You know, we may know more general things about children in the abstract and what motivates them and what worries them, but you're the expert on Lloyd. You're the one who's lived with him for three years; and you're the one who knows what makes him tick."

Occasionally a teacher will check with parents when setting goals for a child, or parents will suggest something they would like the teacher to work on with the child:

> The child had just come into our center. They (parents) said to me, "Would you just be very sensitive with him. He's really having a rough time dealing with so many changes." And they had some suggestions of things that he really likes. They said, "He's really got an outgoing personality, but at school he's really quiet and he holds himself in. We really would like to see him open up more." And I said, "That's what I'm here for."

The reason the child was having a rough time was that the family had moved and there was a new baby on the way. Information on what is occurring in the home is valuable to teachers in planning and decision-making. It's especially helpful when teachers are trying to understand the cause of problems the child is having.

At times what the parents want for the child conflicts with what the teacher thinks best. Such disagreements are upsetting for teachers. In a later section, we will discuss the competency "Setting Limits and Boundaries," where teachers attempt to keep their role separate from the parents'. To maintain the family's trust and to maintain rapport, teachers sometimes must make compromises. For example, a boy's parents were overprotective and did not want him engaging in several playground activities. The teacher felt that the extent of restrictions the parents had in mind would impede the development of the child's gross motor skills, and the child might very well feel left out. A compromise was worked out setting a few rather than many restrictions.

Apart from scheduled parent-teacher conferences, finding time for informal communications with parents allows parents to share their concerns and provides teachers with opportunities to advise parents. Teachers tried to arrange work assignments so they would have opportunities for casual interchanges with parents when they brought the children in or picked them up at the end of the day. When a serious problem arose, a meeting was scheduled. In some cases, teachers facilitated meetings between parents and other professionals such as allergists, child psychologists, and speech therapists.

Teachers willingly shared their expertise with parents, giving specific suggestions. In the following example, inexperienced, busy parents are coached on potty training their child:

> I told the parents, "When you're toilet training, when you're going through and trying to get the child to come to the bathroom, don't stand there waiting for the child so the child feels under pressure. Casually invite the child in, sit there, bring a book that you can look at yourself, or talk to the child. Ask how things are going during the day or something to keep the pressure off. Because if you're sitting there saying, 'I only have a few minutes. I need to go back to studying. Why don't you do it,' the child is saying, 'It's not time, it's almost time, but it's not just the right time.' You're just thinking of the pressure and the conflict, or the child will do it in his pants five minutes later to get back at you. Children can do that. So, try to relax...."

Establishing trust and rapport with families makes everyone's job easier and assures that decisions about the child are based on the best information available.

Self-Management Competencies

ABILITY TO MAINTAIN OWN EQUILIBRIUM
SETTING LIMITS AND BOUNDARIES
SELF-AWARENESS AND DEVELOPMENT

The ability to sustain their enthusiasm for their job, to protect themselves emotionally, and to grow in their capabilities are important competencies of effective child care teachers. The three competencies — Ability to Maintain Own Equilibrium, Setting Limits and Boundaries, and Self-Awareness and Development — were shown with approximately equal frequency by beginning and advanced teachers. This suggests that these three competencies are basic requirements for acceptable performance as a child care teacher.

12. ABILITY TO MAINTAIN OWN EQUILIBRIUM

Definition: *Ability to help oneself remain optimistic and to derive personal satisfaction from what one has been able to accomplish.*

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Sees the funny side of situations
b) Does things to reduce own stress
c) Accepts that children's development takes time and comes in small steps; is patient
d) Derives great satisfaction from each step a child takes developmentally
e) Derives satisfaction from parents' praise and approval

Discussion:

Effective child care teachers care deeply about the children's well-being and growth. When things do not go well for the children, the teacher feels badly. Even when things go smoothly, the job requires constant vigilance and high energy. When things go wrong, such as a big mess created by a child with an upset tummy or a child with diarrhea, a sense of humor serves a teacher well in maintaining his or her equilibrium:

> I wish I had ten hands. One time I was at the table and there were ten kids getting ready to eat, and they were a little impatient. They were all hungry. I was trying to explain to them that I'm only one person and there are

> ten of them. So I said, "Look. See this. I have two hands — one, two. And I can only feed one person at a time. So I don't want anyone to look at me and say, 'I dooonnnnn'ttt haaaaaavvvvvve aaaaannnnnyyy miiiillkk yet!' And guess what happened? Every single one of them said exactly what I'd told them not to say. They mimicked the way I'd said it. "I doooooonnnn'ttt haaaaavvvve aaaaannnnyyy miiilllkk yet!" I set them up! How did they all think of that at the same time? It was amazing. They kept chanting. It was perfect! It was so funny.

Different teachers had different ways of overcoming stress. For some, it was conversations with a supportive spouse, friend, or fellow teacher. For one teacher, it was playing her guitar and singing to the children. Another loved to "dance with the little babies" when things got tense. Another hammed it up with colleagues:

> I find that saying and doing silly things with the adults when we're not in front of the children is a stress release for me, like standing there and going, "I don't know if I'm gonna make it," while I'm pretending to pull my hair out.

A major help in maintaining their equilibrium is the ability to keep their ambitions for the children's progress within realistic bounds and to take pleasure in the small steps forward children take as they develop. In discussing the children finally learning to deal with one another in conflicts over toys, a teacher explains her satisfaction:

> I feel very good for both the children because they've become more tolerant as far as acceptance of one another. There's more tolerance and acceptance on both parts. I'm feeling very good that they've learned socially acceptable ways to deal with these issues, knowing that if they've done it once and been successful, that success breeds success, and they will try it again and hopefully be successful. And this is something that can be carried through the rest of their lives.

Then there is the satisfaction that comes when parents thank them for a good job:

> The parents had sent a letter to the president of the university in support of child care and of the continuing need for quality child care and the need for expansion. And the parents had mentioned that their child had been in our program since he was an infant, and how pleased they were with all the programs. And they mentioned my name. It said something like "Outstanding teachers," such as me, "have made us feel comfortable with leaving our child in the Center, and our child has learned so much and grown so much through being there." And it made me feel really good,

because so often you only hear if there's a problem, so it's really good to be supported and know that what you're doing is really appreciated.

13. SETS LIMITS AND BOUNDARIES

Definition: ***Ability to keep one's own hopes and desires realistic and to manage the expectations others place upon the teachers and program so that they, too, are reasonable.***

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Clarifies to people/parents the program's limitations

b) Attempts to keep teacher role separate from the parents' role; puts professional limits on own role

c) Helps parents understand the teacher's role limitations (for example, the teacher is not a medical doctor or psychologist)

d) Provides full information to people so that they can make the decisions they have responsibility for making

e) Tackles large problems one step at a time; works first where success is most readily attained

Discussion:

Effective teachers set limits on their role. They manage their own expectations and the expectations others place upon them and the program. The result is that their best energies can be dedicated to that which they are best qualified to do — care for young children. Also, it assures that decision-making responsibility is appropriately assigned to parents and other professionals in matters beyond the teachers' expertise or scope of authority.

Again, because they care deeply about the children, it is not always easy to disengage, especially in cases where they disagree with the parents or other professionals about what is best for the child. Nevertheless, they do step back the appropriate distance when the need arises.

Occasionally, expectations were unrealistic, and teachers had to explain the program's limitations:

> She (mother) was a very intense person, and some of the things she wanted done, we just couldn't do. Like one day she brought her baby in,

> and he had a shoelace on him with a pacifier attached and she told me, "I never want you to take this off him." I said, "Well, I'm sorry, but I can't let him have it on when he takes his naps because he could strangle himself." She didn't like that. But I had to say it, and I also told her to please not let him sleep at home with the shoelace. Another day she brought in a toy and said, "Now I don't want any of the other children to touch this toy." I told her we'd only give it to him when he was in the high chair, but we couldn't guarantee that a child would not reach up and grab it. I felt bad that she was upset, but what she wanted was unrealistic.

Often, because of their experience with young children, teachers discovered medical problems and called them to parents' attention. At the same time, they had to explain that they weren't pediatricians and it was really the parents' responsibility to decide to take the child for treatment. In the following example, the teacher provides the parent with all the information needed to make a good decision:

> I explained to the mother that I thought Adam was getting an ear infection. I told her he was sucking his bottle less and less, perhaps because the sucking hurt his ears. And he was cranky, which was unusual for him. I suggested that she watch him that night for these signs. Next morning she said he was fine. As the day went on he got worse and started with a fever. So, I called her. She was still not convinced he needed a doctor. She's a single parent, and doctor visits are very expensive, so I understand her being hesitant. But she said she'd have him checked. I try never to say I think he needs to go to the doctor, because it isn't my decision to make, and it's a question parents constantly ask me. I tell them, "I'm seeing this and this and this, and that usually means the child has an ear infection, or whatever." Given good information, parents usually make good decisions.

Effective teachers also manage what they expect of themselves. They tackle large problems one step at a time. In the following example, a teacher worked with a frail child who was very underdeveloped physically:

> It took about three or four months of work — things like holding her hands and jumping with her — before she started to gain some strength. And it took several months to wean her off my hip. I did that a little bit at a time. I'd sit her down for longer periods of time each day. After about two months I told her that I was not going to carry her around all the time anymore — that it was time for her to be down and play with the other children a little bit and that she could play next to me if she liked. But she would cry to be picked up, and I would kneel down and say, "I'm sorry,

but I'm not going to pick you up and carry you this time." So, I just kind of slowly weaned her off that behavior. I always try to break everything down into little pieces to work towards a big goal. It took about six months for her to feel really confident and begin climbing.

This quotation also exemplifies the teacher's patience and ability to take satisfaction from small steps forward, qualities discussed as part of maintaining one's equilibrium.

14. SELF-AWARENESS AND DEVELOPMENT

Definition: ***Understanding one's own values, needs, strengths and limitations, and working to improve one's professional capabilities.***

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Views self objectively, striving for insights on own emotions, needs, limitations, etc.

b) Analyzes own mistakes and takes steps to assure they are not repeated

c) Takes action to develop own professional capabilities (attending conferences; reading; courses; studying fellow professionals)

d) Seeks help and support of peers and other professionals as needed

Discussion:

A great deal of growth occurs once a teacher begins teaching. A large part of the learning that occurs is about oneself: Why do I feel the way I do? What is it I need to stay viable? What are my strengths? Where can I improve? This reflection on experience and introspection guide the learning process.

Some discordance with other teachers in the beginning of her career led one teacher into some soul searching and ultimately into mastering a style of assertion that did not alienate others. Another teacher, faced for the first time with an autistic child, realized his limitations in dealing with special needs children and spent a great deal of time reading books and articles and checking with special education teachers to see if he was proceeding in the best way. Another teacher was observed and evaluated and learned from the mistakes occurring in her classroom:

> There were many things we were doing very well on. But there was something we were doing poorly. We were slipping into speaking to the children in negative rather than positive sentences; and it's awfully easy to

> say "Stop that! You shouldn't be doing that. Don't do that. I don't like it when you do that" instead of offering suggestions and going over and redirecting — using positive methods of discipline. "If you don't stop that right now, I'm going to put you in the Time Out chair" — we'd fallen into that trap. And when they told me about it, I was really depressed, because I thought we were doing fine. So, now I'm really keeping an eye on that so we don't slip into it again.

The most frequent kind of self-development teachers engaged in was scanning through resource books to expand their repertoire of activities for the children. In problem-solving, teachers most often consulted the centers' leadership, their peers, and other professionals.

Occasionally, teachers had an opportunity to visit other centers as observers. They valued these opportunities highly as an effective way of learning about alternatives to the practices with which they were familiar. At formal staff development workshops teachers learned about new developments in the field and exchanged ideas with their peers.

All told, the three competencies related to self-management kept teachers psychologically healthy and technically capable.

Achievement Competencies

INITIATIVE
JOB COMMITMENT
SELF-CONFIDENCE

The three achievement competencies equip the child care teacher with attitudes and abilities to assume leadership of his or her classroom. Initiative and Self-Confidence were demonstrated significantly more often by advanced than by beginning teachers. This statistically significant difference suggests that the competencies must be mastered before overall excellence of performance can be achieved.

Job Commitment was demonstrated with approximately equal frequency by beginning and advanced teachers. This suggests that Job Commitment is a basic requirement for doing an acceptable job as a child care teacher.

15. INITIATIVE

Definition: ***Taking action before being told to do so or being forced into action by circumstances; being proactive rather than reactive.***

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Takes the lead in problem-solving; acts to prevent problems from becoming crises

b) Follows through on all aspects of problem-solving; assures that "all fires are out"

c) Presses beyond superficial facts to get at underlying factors

d) Resourceful in obtaining materials and making do with minimal resources

Discussion:

Effective teachers do not wait to be told that there's a problem and that action is needed. They act swiftly at the first indication of trouble. For example, they quickly isolate children they suspect could have an infectious illness. In one case, a teacher's fast action prevented the spread of meningitis. In another case, syrup of ipecac was promptly given to children who had eaten some berries the teacher suspected may have been poisonous. The teachers also took initiative in keeping parents informed of important matters regarding their children and the program.

Effective teachers not only took the initiative, but they followed through to be certain problems actually were solved. A teacher who had been highly proactive in getting a good placement for a special needs child, followed through to be sure the conclusion was satisfactory:

> The mother was at the P.E.T. meeting, and I wanted to be real sure that she didn't feel completely overwhelmed by all the experts. I wanted her to feel like we were all there for her and to support her and help her get the best placement for her child. And I asked her the next time she came to the center how she felt about the meeting and that I hoped she felt supported, because that was really what I was hoping she'd feel. And she did say that she did.

The initiative teachers took included proactive information gathering. Most often the information sought was about the children. The questions asked of parents and other people who knew the child helped the teacher in accurately diagnosing problems and deciding a best course of action.

Tight budgets led teachers to be inventive and resourceful in securing needed resources and in problem-solving:

> When we had the older children, we'd go for lots of walks. We couldn't do that with the two and a half and three-year-olds. They'd wander off. I finally came up with an idea using a rope. I put a series of knots in the rope and had each child hold onto a knot. I explained that this was their very own knot, and they were not to let go of their knot. And it's really successful. I can take my group for a walk now, and they hold onto the rope. It gives them something concrete to keep us together safely, and they don't let go of the rope. It's just amazing.

16. JOB COMMITMENT

Definition: *Commitment to the child care profession and dedicated effort on behalf of the children in one's care.*

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Feels a sense of vocation or "calling" to child care

b) Promotes a strong, positive image for the child care profession; is disappointed when status or image problems arise

c) "Goes the extra mile"; puts forth extra effort on behalf of the children, their families and the program

d) Keeps striving toward goals over long periods of time, despite adversities

e) Understands and upholds agency procedures (SOPs) and state laws

Discussion:

Effective child care teachers have a strong commitment to working in the early childhood phase of children's education. They seem to take particular pleasure working with this age group. One teacher, who had majored in elementary education, was exposed to day care teaching and decided to pursue full-time work in early childhood:

> Working in early childhood had never crossed my mind. But (practice teaching in a day care center) when I woke up I never thought to myself, "Oh, no, I have to go to work." I always thought to myself, "Oh, it's raining. We can get out the play dough today." I'd get so excited, and just little things like that and just that feeling of waking up in the morning and looking forward to going to work. It means so much to me. And the

other day when it snowed, I was so excited. I couldn't wait to get to work. I couldn't wait to take the kids out to play in the snow.

Child care teachers showed a strong concern for the image of their field. They wanted to do whatever they could to create a strong positive image for day care and a strong professional image for child care teachers. They were particularly disappointed when their job was characterized as "babysitting." In the following example, a new lead teacher changed the program she inherited:

> The program is much better organized now. It's a lot more structured. Before it was — I felt it was mainly just a babysitting service, and I felt that we needed to make it along the day care lines and really give the parents what they're paying for.

The commitment of child care teachers was also evident when situations arose requiring extra effort. Serving the children well sometimes meant doing the paperwork at home. Lunches are sometimes missed in caring for a sick child. One teacher took a child home with her until the mother, who had gotten sick, could arrange for family to pick up the child.

We spoke earlier about setting limits, which preserves the health of teachers. It bears noting that the limits set do not exclude extra effort and extending themselves on the behalf of children, parents, and peers.

Another aspect of commitment is the persistence shown in dealing with difficult situations. There were several examples of slowly working towards goals. One mentioned earlier was the frail child whose confidence to become physically active took the teacher six months to develop. There were several similar examples including a teacher's work with a special needs child with a speech disability:

> I've seen him making progress here, and there's no telling how far he can go. And so we persist, since he's doing well, and I'm part of that. His vocalization is improving. He's not just screaming anymore. He's trying to say things. In his mind it seems like he's concentrating more and he's putting something out.

Another aspect of job commitment is doing things that are not fun. Upholding the rules is not always easy. Insisting with parents that they cannot leave a sick child at the center is not easy when the teacher knows the parent must miss work. Filling out injury reports and required paperwork is done carefully, despite its lack of appeal.

Without this level of commitment on the part of beginning as well as advanced teachers, quality day care could not exist as an option for parents.

17. SELF-CONFIDENCE

Definition: ***Belief in one's own capabilities and judgment and the ability to maintain self-esteem despite personal limitations.***

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Believes in his/her ability to help children overcome problems

b) Believes in the accuracy of his/her feelings or insights

c) Is comfortable discussing own strengths and limitations

Discussion:

Self-confidence was demonstrated significantly more often by advanced than by beginning teachers. The competency appears to grow in strength on the job as teachers broaden their knowledge about child care.

Self-confident teachers believe in their ability to help children overcome problems. Their confidence in themselves is the foundation for the fortitude they exhibit in overcoming obstacles. For example, two teachers confronted with a pattern of aggressive behavior on the part of groups of children both felt confident they could succeed in overcoming the problem. And, indeed, they succeeded — one through puppet shows, and the other through restructuring activities.

Effective child care teachers also trust their instincts. For example, if they sense that a child has a problem, they follow through with careful observation and, at times, consultation. Throughout each day, they make judgments about what is or is not appropriate for the group or for a given child and follow through on what they believe. For example, a teacher was asked by a parent reluctant to send her child to day care whether she (teacher) thought the child would adapt. The teacher observed the child at his home and felt he would probably have a hard time at first but would do well in the long run:

> My feelings are always confirmed. He did just fine after a week or so, but the first day, he cried a lot during the day until his mother picked him up. So we had to work with him a little bit differently than we do with some children.

An indicator of self-confidence, shared by professionals in many fields, is comfort in discussing their strengths and limitations. Insecure people prevent disclosures of their weaknesses and tend to worry about discussing their strengths for fear others might think they are bragging. Self-confident teachers mentioned, for example, their limitations in dealing with "special needs" children. They mentioned their limitations in being effective when the ratio of teachers to children is too low. On the other hand, they talked easily about their skill, dedication, and concern for the children.

Interpersonal Competencies

EMPATHY
NONVERBAL UNDERSTANDING

The most frequent interactions of child care teachers are with the children. Next in frequency come interactions with co-workers, parents, and center administrators. The teachers' ability to empathize and to interpret nonverbal cues serves as the foundation for effective communications with all the people with whom they interact.

Both Empathy and Nonverbal Understanding were demonstrated significantly more often by advanced than by beginning teachers. This suggests that these competencies must be mastered before overall excellence of performance can be achieved. Also, it is probable that these competencies are mastered on the job, especially as the competencies relate to young children who haven't learned to talk or whose facility with spoken language is not on a par with adults'.

18. EMPATHY

Definition: *The ability to view a situation from another person's or group's perspective and to understand their feelings.*

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Understands children's perspective — how they are seeing things; what they are thinking and feeling

b) Understands the perspective of parents — their concerns, needs, interests, etc.

Discussion:

While there were examples of teachers being empathetic towards co-workers and administrators, most of the examples were of empathy with the children and parents. It is an impressive skill when a teacher can remember what it was like to be a child and see the world from a child's perspective. In the following example, the teacher empathizes with a child who has severe allergies and a very restricted range of foods he can eat:

> I have been working with the child, giving the parents support, but also working with the child and giving him support so he doesn't feel too different. He cannot have any of the foods the children have, or only red

> fruits and one of the vegetables. The child has been having problems with that. "I don't want to eat this. I want to eat what the other kids are having." Or, "Why can't I do this?" and I'm telling him "It may make you sick." And he's thinking, "I'm not going to throw up. I'm not going to make an accident in my pants. I'm not going to get sick." What we're talking about is all Chinese to him.

Many of the examples of empathy with parents revolved around problems of the children and the teacher's struggle to see things from a different perspective:

> I explained the symptoms to the mother and told her I thought it could be an ear infection. That's about the only thing you can really say. I can't just say, "For heaven's sake, just do it (take child to doctor)." I was thinking, "How can you wait?" But you have to be patient with parents. Some of them have been brought up in a way that you don't just go see a doctor unless you're sure it's something very serious. You have to think about these things, and then you don't know whether they think that you're just overreacting to the child, that they know them better. And that's within their right to think, too.

Understanding the perspective of parents helped the teacher accept the limits of his/her role.

19. NONVERBAL UNDERSTANDING

Definition: *The ability to accurately interpret information communicated in non-standard ways such as through body language, gestures, and tone of voice.*

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Reads the hidden message in conversation

b) Interprets nonverbal messages from body language, gestures, tone of voice, etc.

Discussion:

Teachers with nonverbal understanding were able to listen to what people were saying and interpret the hidden message in those cases where the communication was not straightforward. Some call it the ability to "read between the lines." In the following example, the mother said she and her husband were taking the child to a psychologist because she was worried about the child's adjustment:

> I can't help but feel that there are other reasons they were going to the psychologist or other things that are going to happen, meaning that I think maybe the mom feels that she is having pressures and problems with her husband and taking the child to the psychologist may bring some of the problems out and be of help there. I think that one or both the parents may be thinking this could help all of them.

In working with infants and toddlers who cannot speak or whose speech is virtually unintelligible, nonverbal understanding is a critical skill. Knowing the signals of exhaustion; knowing the cues that the child needs to visit the potty; knowing when the child needs to be picked up and comforted; knowing when the child is hungry or thirsty.

Nonverbal understanding served the teachers well in working with both adults and children.

The child care teachers in this sample, therefore, demonstrated a wide range of competencies. Their teaching responsibilities called for educational and cognitive skills as well as management competencies. In their orientation to their work, they showed skill in self-management, achievement, and interpersonal relations. The evidence they have provided begins to clarify the characteristics that underlie effective performance in a child care setting.

4 The Competency Model: Statistical Analysis

This section describes the statistical analysis of the data used to determine the competencies of child care teachers. Transcripts of the interviews with the teachers in the study were coded for presence of each behavior. The frequency of each behavior was calculated for each interviewee and summed within each competency. These sums were entered into a statistical analysis of differences in four categories:

Job Performance: beginning or advanced teacher

Job Rank: assistant teacher or head teacher

Educational background: two years' college or less or four years' college or more

Job Focus: infants, toddlers, or preschool children

The tables showing the statistical analysis of the differences between the groups in these categories are shown as Appendices D to G. The wide variety of behavior shown in the transcripts resulted in a rich and complex model. Originally 28 competencies were identified and analyzed. However, nine of these competencies were eliminated from the final model because of the very low frequency of occurrence (exhibited only two times or less).

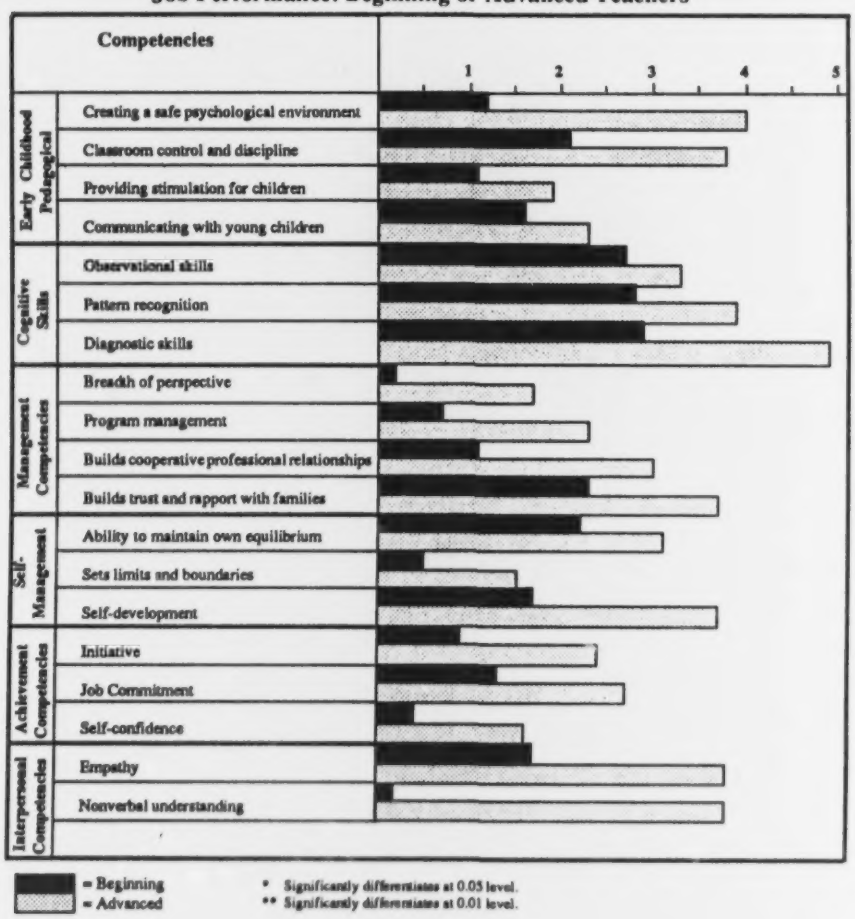
Job Performance: Beginning or Advanced Child Care Teachers

Table 3 summarizes the findings of the comparison between the beginning and advanced child care teachers in the study. Eight of the competencies (the optimal ones) distinguished the advanced teachers in the sample from the beginning group:

Skill in Creating a Safe Psychological Environment
Breadth of Perspective
Program Management
Building Cooperative Professional Relationships
Initiative
Self-Confidence
Empathy
Nonverbal Understanding

Table 3

Job Performance: Beginning or Advanced Teachers



The eleven remaining competencies (the required ones) were displayed with approximately equal frequency by both groups:

Skill in Classroom Control and Discipline
Skill in Providing Stimulation for Children
Skill in Communicating with Young Children
Observational Skills
Pattern Recognition
Diagnostic Skill
Building Trust and Rapport with Families
Ability to Maintain Own Equilibrium
Setting Limits and Boundaries
Self-Development
Job Commitment

These findings suggest that these required competencies be considered as the minimal competencies needed for effective functioning on the job. In hiring and selection, these competencies should be seen as the first, minimal requirements. The optimal competencies can be used to screen for potential for superior performance.

Despite the small number of observations of each competency, eight of the competencies do significantly differentiate the advanced from the beginning teachers. Moreover, the competency of Program Management differentiates at the 0.01 level, suggesting a high level of relationship between this competency and excellence as a child care teacher. In fact, three of the four management competencies (Breadth of Perspective, Program Management, and Building Cooperative Professional Relationships) all significantly differentiate advanced teachers. This suggests that an effective teacher in a child care center needs program management skills.

The competencies that appear with the greatest frequency are shown by both beginning and advanced teachers. These are Skill in Classroom Control and Discipline, Building Trust and Rapport with Families, and the three Cognitive competencies (Observational Skills, Pattern Recognition, and Diagnostic Skills). The frequent demonstration of these competencies and the fact that they are required for both beginning and excellent performance signal their importance in screening and training child care teachers.

Job Rank: Assistant Teacher or Head Teacher

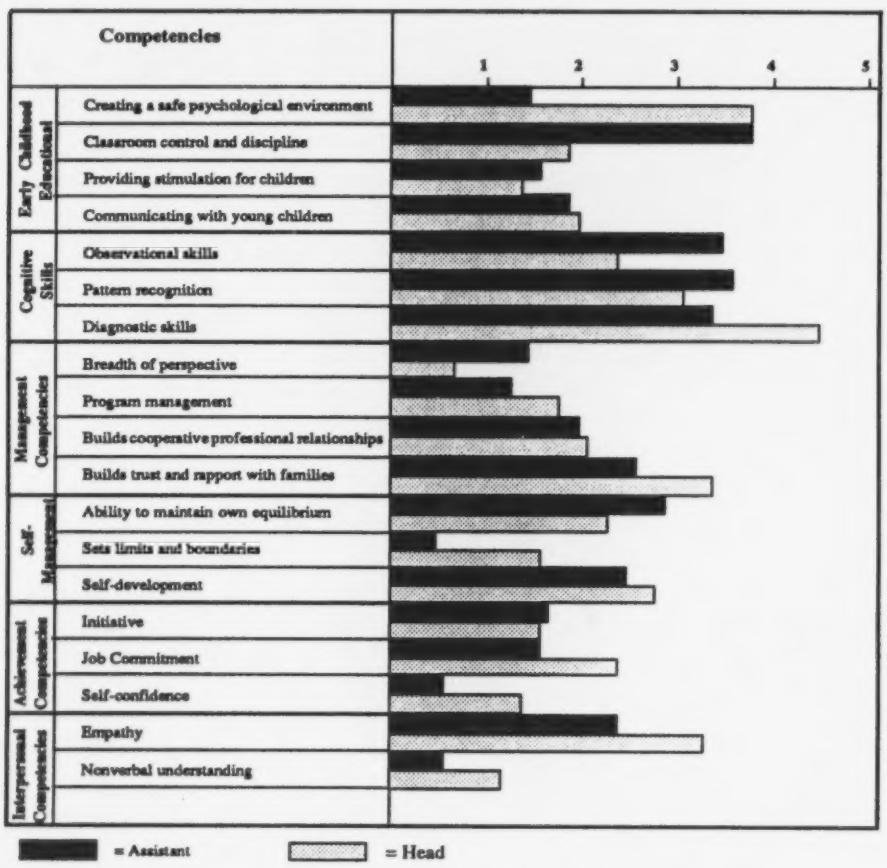
The teachers in this study are currently classified as either head teacher (a professional position requiring a four-year degree) or assistant teacher (a non-exempt position). Table 4 shows the comparison between these two groups.

None of the competencies were demonstrated significantly more by head teachers than by assistant teachers. While the majority of competencies were displayed more frequently by head teachers, seven of them (Skill in Classroom Control and Discipline, Skill in Providing Simulation for Children, Observational Skill, Pattern Recognition, Breadth of Perspective, Ability to Maintain own Equilibrium, and Initiative) were displayed more often by assistant teachers. These slight differences are not statistically significant, meaning that they are "chance" occurrences.

These findings are supported by the task data which showed virtually no difference between the tasks, skills, knowledge, and physical demands of these two job groups.

Table 4

Job Rank: Assistant or Head Teacher



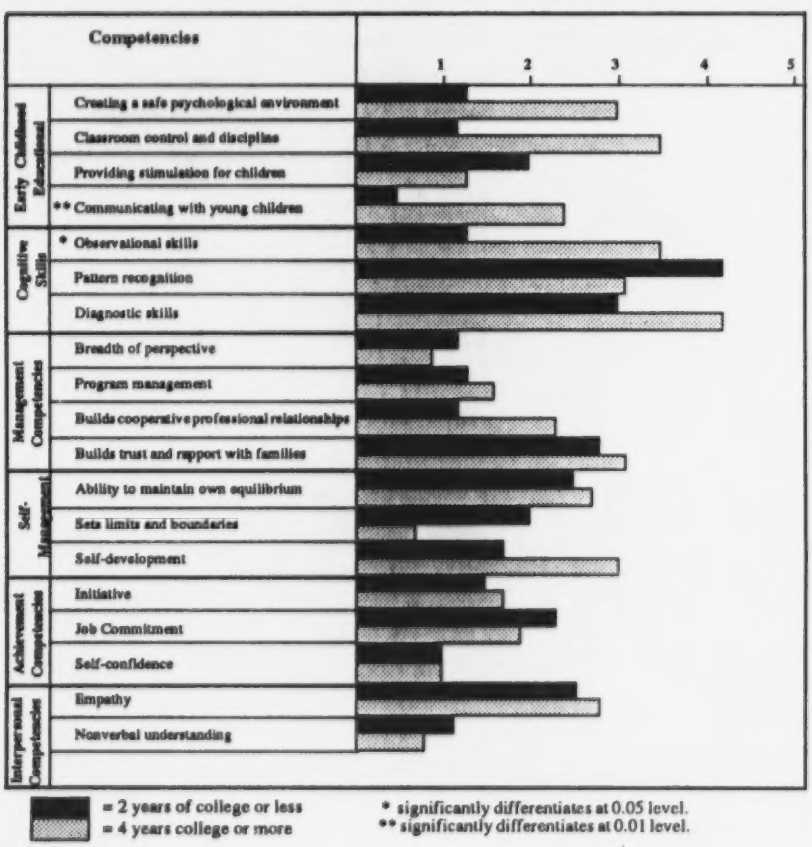
Educational Background

Table 5 shows a comparison of the competencies shown by those teachers with an educational level of two years college or less and those with four years of college or more. The original design for the analysis included plans to compare those with high school diploma, two years of college, four years of college, and graduate education. Because of the small size of the sample, this analysis was not possible.

Only two of the competencies (Skill in Communicating with Young Children and Observational Skill) were demonstrated significantly more by those teachers with four years or more of college than by those with two years or less. This finding is consistent with national research on characteristics of child care workers which shows that the amount of formal education without regard to content does not relate to effective performance (Ruopp et al., 1979).

Table 5

Educational Background:
Two Years College or Four Years College or More

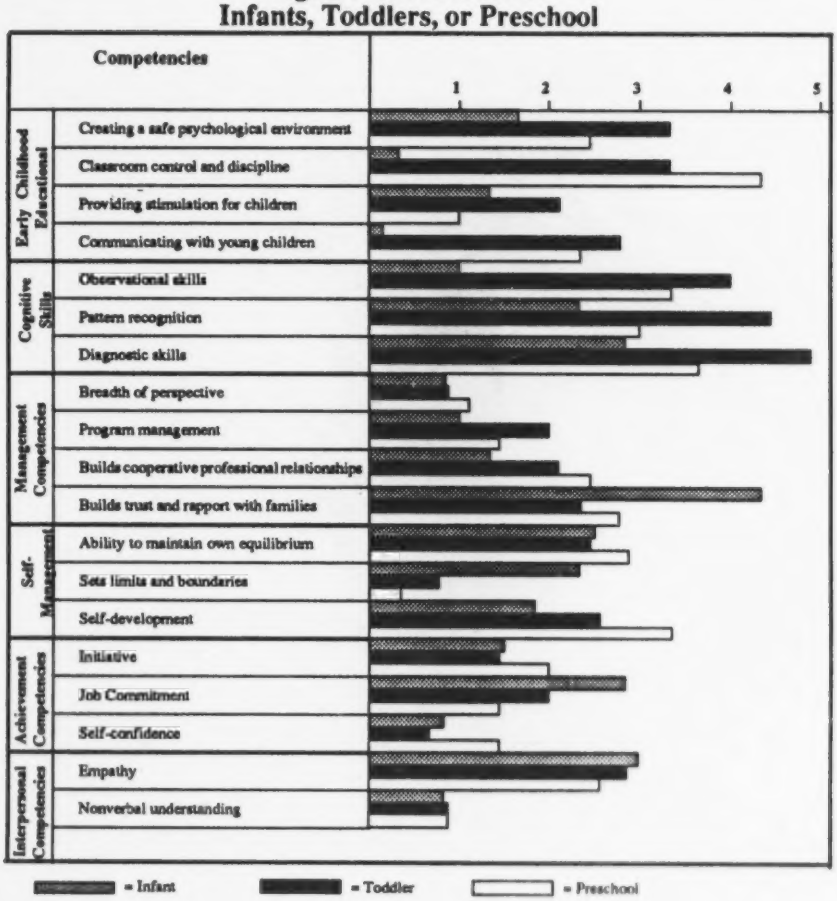


Age Level of Children: Infant, Toddler, or Preschool

An Anova test of significance was used to compare the competencies shown by teachers of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers (Table 6). Because of the small numbers in each of the groups, none of the competencies significantly differentiates among the three groups of teachers. Although some of the competencies appeared to distinguish the three groups, this result could have been achieved by chance and further studies should be conducted to elucidate whether or not there are differences.

Table 6

Age Level of Students: Infants, Toddlers, or Preschool



5 | Some Implications and Applications of the Study

The competency model derived from the sample of child care teachers in centers located in higher education in Maine offers a solid framework for expanding the knowledge base related to the teaching of young children. In addition, the study raises several questions for further exploration and provides a management tool with a wide variety of applications.

Unlike previous research such as the CDA model which is based on observation and expert knowledge of child care, this model derives directly from the teachers' own reports of their behavior. This approach has provided some new information on what it takes to be an effective child care teacher.

First, the model highlights the importance of managerial competencies. The teachers operate in an organizational context where positive relationships with families, with other teachers and professionals, and with the center administrators are all essential to effective functioning. Second, the self-management and achievement competencies have not been identified in previous work, though some of the indicators are suggested under the CDA competency of professionalism. The self-management competencies reflect the teachers' abilities to sustain enthusiasm for their job, to protect themselves emotionally, and to grow in their capabilities. Like the achievement competencies, these are a necessary antidote to burnout. Their emphasis in training and selection would help to alleviate burnout and turnover in the child care profession.

The statistical analysis shows no significant differences distinguishing assistant teachers from head teachers. This failure of the model to discriminate by job title is consistent with discussions elsewhere on the non-hierarchical and undifferentiated nature of child care work (Pettygrove and Greenman, 1984; Kontos and Stremmel, 1988). A competency-based model challenges hierarchies because it calls into question the traditional academic-based credit requirements and credentials which support them. (CDA proponents have had little success in replacing such requirements with the competency-based credential.) Even if such inappropriate hierarchies could be eliminated, how would levels of growing competence, initiative, and responsibility be recognized and supported? Such recognition would seem to depend on more explicit and systematic methods of competence assessment on the job.

The overall failure of the model (with two exceptions) to discriminate by education level of the teachers is consistent with research beginning with the National Day Care Study (Ruopp et al., 1979), which indicates that neither aggregates of formal education nor length of work experience is related to staff performance. Specialized work-related training, however, whether through traditional academic channels or other modes, has been shown to be related to performance. Further research on the competence model presented here should examine the relationship between such training and levels of competence.

Although the analysis of differences in competencies in terms of the age of the children served showed no statistically significant patterns, the distinctions that did appear suggest the need for more exploration. The apparent differences are consistent with what is known about working with children of different ages. A more clearly delineated model would be very useful in selecting and placing staff, especially within multi-age programs. And it would certainly support efforts to develop specialized curricula appropriate to needs at different ages. What the model suggests is that differences in staff performance are required not only by the developmental needs of the child, but also by changing needs of the family as the child develops.

The findings of this study have several direct applications to human resource management at USM and to child care teachers generally. As part of a larger effort to improve the hiring and selection process at USM, the data have direct application to the hiring process. The competency model will allow much greater clarity about the requirements of the job and the characteristics needed by the person who is to do the job. In this way, the person/job match will be improved. In addition, information from the task analysis can be used to better screen applicants, particularly in the area of physical demands.

The study data also has potential application to inservice training for child care teachers. Training in the competencies themselves can be provided through the following process. First, opportunities need to be provided for trainees to understand and recognize the competencies. Incidents from the transcripts provide a variety of examples of the competencies which can be utilized. The second step is to provide individuals an opportunity to assess themselves in relation to the competencies. To accomplish this, a self-assessment rating needs to be designed. Third, individuals need an opportunity to practice the competencies and to be provided feedback on their performance. Such opportunities can be provided either in simulated situations in training or through a form of guided application where an individual can report back on his or her experiences in practicing the competencies. A developmental plan based on competencies could be a helpful framework for supervising and providing feedback to individuals.

From the broad spectrum of child care settings, this study has focused on a small segment of the population of child care teachers. The results have been illuminating and

exciting. The myth of the child care teacher as babysitter is clearly dispelled by the evidence of technical, cognitive, managerial, and interpersonal competencies identified in this study. The self-management, cognitive, and achievement competencies are similar to those demonstrated by middle- and upper-level managers in studies using the same technique.

The insights into the self-management and achievement competencies are particularly important. These are the same competencies that allow workers in other stressful occupations, such as child welfare, to manage their stress and focus their energy. Emphasis on these competencies in the pre-service preparation of child care teachers would help prevent burnout. Inservice training and supervision provide opportunities to validate the importance of these competencies and to nurture and promote them.

The centrality of the management competencies indicates that the role of the child care teacher is much broader than it is currently conceived. The teacher interacts with other professionals both vertically and laterally and interfaces with other support systems to promote the most effective services for children. This suggests that more emphasis should be placed on networking skills. Attention should also be paid to the importance of interdisciplinary communication, coordination of services, and techniques of case conferencing.

The safekeeping of so many of the nation's children is a complex undertaking. This study has attempted to elucidate the characteristics needed by child care teachers to carry out this trust.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A	Job Profile for Assistant Teacher
APPENDIX B	Job Profile for Head Teacher
APPENDIX C	Child Care Competency Model
APPENDIX D	Comparison of Competencies of Beginning and Advanced Teacher
APPENDIX E	Comparison of Competencies of Assistant and Head Teacher
APPENDIX F	Comparison of Competencies by Educational Level
APPENDIX G	Comparison of Competencies by Age Level of Students

APPENDIX A
Job Profile for Assistant Teacher

Child Care Teacher Job Profile
Assistant Teacher

Note: Tasks are listed in order of priority from highest to lowest based on frequency, time spent and importance to overall job performance.

1. Provides physical and emotional security for each child; gives one-on-one attention, expresses interest and enjoyment in each child; has affectionate and appropriate physical contact with each child in order to help each child to know, accept and take pride in himself or herself and to develop a sense of independence.

2. Actively communicates with children (talking, listening and responding); demonstrates respect and courtesy; provides activities to promote use of language (singing, telling stories, reading); supports and encourages children's communication/language achievements in order to help children understand, acquire and use verbal and nonverbal means of communicating thoughts and feelings.

3. Assesses each child's behavior in relation to appropriate level of development; models and encourages appropriate social behavior; helps children recognize, express and deal with social behavior issues (e.g., sharing, cooperation, separation) in order to help children feel accepted, learn to communicate and get along with others and encourage feelings of empathy and mutual respect.

4. Uses appropriate methods of positive guidance (listening, reinforcement, redirection); anticipates and manages transitions, confrontations and problems; in order to provide a supportive environment for children to learn and practice appropriate and acceptable behaviors as individuals and as a group.

5. Provides a variety of activities and opportunities; communicates, models and encourages active learning; recognizes learning problems and makes referrals according to Center policy in order to encourage curiosity, exploration and problem-solving appropriate to the developmental levels and learning styles of children.

6. Attends to physical needs of children (food, diapering, toileting, napping); demonstrates and models concern for hygiene; maintains clean environment; follows Center procedures for dealing with sick children in order to promote good health and nutrition and provide an environment that contributes to the prevention of illness.

7. Monitors environment, equipment and behavior of children, demonstrates and models concern for safety, participates in monthly fire drills in order to provide a safe environment to prevent and reduce injuries.

8. Provides activities, materials and equipment that stimulate children to play with sound, rhythm, language, space and ideas; models and encourages creative, new and independent activities in order to assist children to express their creative abilities.

9. Provides a variety of equipment, activities and opportunities; communicates, models and encourages appropriate behavior; observes, evaluates and informs parents in cases of developmental delay in order to promote the physical development of children.

10. Plans and uses space, relationships, materials and routines; assesses appropriateness of materials/equipment/activities and makes recommendations for innovation or more appropriate use in order to construct an interesting, secure and enjoyable learning environment.

11. Maintains open, friendly and cooperative relationship with each child's family; daily shares information on each child's achievements; encourages involvement of family in program, supports the child's relationship with his or her family; arranges parent conferences in order to establish positive and productive relationships with families.

12. Keeps records on the development of individual children; assesses and makes plans responsive to the developmental needs of each child and the group as a whole; takes daily attendance in order to assist in managing the Center.

13. Attends weekly staff meetings; works cooperatively with other staff; communicates openly in order to work as a team with other staff.

14. Gives direction; observes and evaluates performance; models appropriate behavior; assures that the experiences of student teachers meet the goals for the academic requirements of student teaching placement in order to supervise and support teachers, student teachers and work-study students.

15. Arranges weekly team meetings and leads discussion on curriculum content and children's development; attends weekly staff meetings; takes inventory and makes recommendation on reordering supplies; works cooperatively with other staff; communicates openly in order to work as a team with other staff and promote smooth functioning of classroom and Center.

16. Makes decisions based on knowledge of early childhood theories and practice, promotes quality in child care services; keeps up-to-date in the field; maintains appropriate contact with various multidisciplinary professions outside the program in order to maintain a commitment to professionalism.

Skills and Knowledge

Note: Skills and knowledge items are listed in priority order from highest to lowest based on their importance at entry in differentiating between performance levels, their importance in recruiting and the need for training.

1. Ability to work cooperatively with other adults as part of a team.
2. Ability to provide direct personal care to meet the needs of children including feeding, diapering, toileting, cleaning, napping and housekeeping.
3. Ability to exchange information verbally with parents and other related professionals and give directions to children.
4. Ability to persuade children to most appropriate behavior particularly new, safer or transitional activities.
5. Ability to direct attention to more acceptable behavior.
6. Ability to provide emotional support, empathy, tact and to defuse emotional tension.
7. Ability to instruct children through demonstrations and modeling.
8. Ability to assess information about children in relation to developmental and health norms and standards and make recommendations to parents and/or make changes in activities or behavior towards the child.
9. Ability to evaluate appropriateness of materials/equipment/activities and make recommendations for innovative or more appropriate use.
10. Ability to plan and coordinate activities and programs including developing lesson plans, themes, special events, parent/teacher conferences.
11. Ability to supervise interns and work-study students including giving directions, observing behavior, modeling appropriate behavior.
12. Knowledge of pediatric emergency procedures.
13. Ability to make plans to ensure proper coverage exists at all times.
14. Ability to fill out forms (take attendance and meal counts).
15. Ability to operate a variety of automatic machines (e.g., washing machine, dryer, microwave, copying machine, toaster oven).
16. Ability to review/evaluate performance of interns.

Physical Demands

Note: Physical demands are listed in order of priority from highest to lowest based on frequency, time spent and importance to overall job performance.

1. Needs clarity of vision both close up and at a distance.
2. Needs to hear to do a major portion of the job (assessing the children, and monitoring for safety).
3. Regularly needs to stoop to pick things up, pay attention to children, rub backs, clean up messes and play games.
4. Needs to work both inside and outside in a very noisy environment.
5. Regularly needs to talk to co-workers, children and parents.
6. Regularly needs to reach to get toys, food, diapers.
7. Exposure to some environmental hazards (danger of infections, tripping over toys, some noxious smells).
8. Regularly needs to handle and use fingers to hold baby bottles, turn washing machine dials, show how to use toys (Lego, painting), dress children.
9. Regularly needs to hold things and keep them balanced (e.g., baby and bottle).
10. Regularly needs to lift and carry children weighing up to 35 pounds.
11. Regularly needs to push up to 20 pounds and occasionally pull up to 160 pounds (monthly evacuation drill of infant cribs).
12. Regularly needs to climb stairs.

APPENDIX B
Job Profile for Head Teacher

Child Care Teacher Job Profile
Head Teacher

Note: Tasks are listed in order of priority from highest to lowest based on frequency, time spent and importance to overall job performance.

1. Provides physical and emotional security for each child; gives one-on-one attention, expresses interest and enjoyment in each child; has affectionate and appropriate physical contact with each child in order to help each child to know, accept and take pride in himself or herself and to develop a sense of independence.

2. Actively communicates with children (talking, listening and responding); demonstrates respect and courtesy; provides activities to promote use of language (singing, telling stories, reading); supports and encourages children's communication/language achievements in order to help children understand, acquire and use verbal and nonverbal means of communicating thoughts and feelings.

3. Attends to physical needs of children (food, diapering, toileting, napping), demonstrates and models concern for hygiene, maintains clean environment, follows Center procedures for dealing with sick children in order to promote good health and nutrition and provide an environment that contributes to the prevention of illness.

4. Assesses each child's behavior in relation to appropriate level of development; models and encourages appropriate social behavior; helps children recognize, express and deal with social behavior issues (e.g., sharing, cooperation, separation) in order to help children feel accepted, learn to communicate and get along with others and encourage feelings of empathy and mutual respect.

5. Uses appropriate methods of positive guidance (listening, reinforcement, redirection); anticipates and manages transitions, confrontations and problems; in order to provide a supportive environment for children to learn and practice appropriate and acceptable behaviors as individuals and as a group.

6. Provides activities, materials and equipment that stimulate children to play with sound, rhythm, language, space and ideas; models and encourages creative, new and independent activities in order to assist children to express their creative abilities.

7. Provides a variety of equipment, activities and opportunities; communicates, models and encourages appropriate behavior; observes, evaluates and informs parents in cases of developmental delay in order to promote the physical development of children.

8. Monitors environment, equipment and behavior of children, demonstrates and models concern for safety, participates in monthly fire drills in order to provide a safe environment to prevent and reduce injuries.

9. Provides a variety of activities and opportunities; communicates, models and encourages active learning; recognizes learning problems and makes referrals according to Center policy in order to encourage curiosity, exploration and problem-solving appropriate to the developmental levels and learning styles of children.

10. Plans and uses space, relationships, materials and routines; assesses appropriateness of materials/equipment/activities and makes recommendations for innovation or more appropriate use in order to construct an interesting, secure and enjoyable learning environment.

11. Maintains open, friendly and cooperative relationship with each child's family; daily shares information on each child's achievements; encourages involvement of family in program, supports the child's relationship with his or her family; arranges parent conferences in order to establish positive and productive relationships with families.

12. Attends weekly staff meetings; works cooperatively with other staff; communicates openly in order to work as a team with other staff.

13. Keeps records on the development of individual children; assesses and makes plans responsive to the developmental needs of each child and the group as a whole; takes daily attendance in order to assist in managing the Center.

14. Gives direction; observes and evaluates performance; models appropriate behavior; assures that the experiences of student teachers meet the goals for the academic requirements of student teaching placement in order to supervise and support teachers, student teachers and work-study students.

15. Arranges weekly team meetings and leads discussion on curriculum content and children's development; attends weekly staff meetings; takes inventory and makes recommendation on reordering supplies; works cooperatively with other staff; communicates openly in order to work as a team with other staff and promote smooth functioning of classroom and Center.

16. Makes decisions based on knowledge of early childhood theories and practice, promotes quality in child care services; keeps up-to-date in the field; maintains appropriate contact with various multidisciplinary professions outside the program in order to maintain a commitment to professionalism.

Skills and Knowledge

Note: Skills and knowledge items are listed in priority order from highest to lowest based on their importance at entry in differentiating between performance levels, their importance in recruiting and the need for training.

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3. Ability to evaluate appropriateness of materials/equipment/activities and make recommendations for innovative or more appropriate use.
4. Ability to provide emotional support, empathy, tact and to defuse emotional tension.
5. Ability to plan and coordinate activities and programs including developing lesson plans, themes, special events, parent/teacher conferences.
6. Ability to direct attention to more acceptable behavior.
7. Ability to work cooperatively with other adults as part of a team.
8. Ability to assess information about children in relation to developmental and health norms and standards and make recommendations to parents and/or make changes in activities or behavior towards the child.
9. Ability to persuade children to most appropriate behavior particularly new, safer or transitional activities.
10. Ability to supervise interns and work-study students including giving directions, observing behavior, modeling appropriate behavior.
11. Ability to instruct children through demonstrations and modeling.
12. Ability to review/evaluate performance of interns.
13. Ability to make plans to ensure proper coverage exists at all times.
14. Knowledge of pediatric emergency procedures.
15. Ability to operate a variety of automatic machines (e.g., washing machine, dryer, microwave, copying machine, toaster oven).
16. Ability to fill out forms (take attendance and meal counts).

Physical Demands

Note: Physical demands are listed in order of priority from highest to lowest based on frequency, time spent and importance to overall job performance.

1. Needs to hear to do a major portion of the job (assessing the children, and monitoring for safety).
2. Needs clarity of vision both close up and at a distance.
3. Regularly needs to stoop to pick things up, pay attention to children, rub backs, clean up messes and play games.
4. Regularly needs to talk to co-workers, children and parents.
5. Regularly needs to reach to get toys, food, diapers.
6. Exposure to some environmental hazards (danger of infections, tripping over toys, some noxious smells).
7. Needs to work both inside and outside in a very noisy environment.
8. Regularly needs to handle and use fingers to hold baby bottles, turn washing machine dials, show how to use toys (Lego, painting), dress children.
9. Regularly needs to hold things and keep them balanced (e.g., baby and bottle).
10. Regularly needs to lift and carry children weighing up to 35 pounds.
11. Regularly needs to push up to 20 pounds and occasionally pull up to 160 pounds (monthly evacuation drill of infant cribs).
12. Regularly needs to climb stairs.

APPENDIX C
Child Care Competency Model

Child Care Competencies: Summary

Early Childhood Educational Competencies

SKILL IN CREATING A PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE, SECURE ENVIRONMENT
SKILL IN CLASSROOM CONTROL AND DISCIPLINE
SKILL IN PROVIDING STIMULATION FOR CHILDREN
SKILL IN COMMUNICATING WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Cognitive Competencies

OBSERVATIONAL SKILL
PATTERN RECOGNITION
DIAGNOSTIC SKILL

Management Competencies

BREADTH OF PERSPECTIVE
PROGRAM MANAGEMENT
BUILDING COOPERATIVE PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS
BUILDING TRUST AND RAPPORT WITH FAMILIES

Self-Management Competencies

ABILITY TO MAINTAIN OWN EQUILIBRIUM
SETTING LIMITS AND BOUNDARIES
SELF-AWARENESS AND DEVELOPMENT

Achievement Competencies

INITIATIVE
JOB COMMITMENT
SELF-CONFIDENCE

Interpersonal Competencies

EMPATHY
NONVERBAL UNDERSTANDING

Child Care Teacher Competency Model

Early Childhood Educational Competencies

1. SKILL IN CREATING A PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE, SECURE ENVIRONMENT

   Definition: *Understanding what children need to feel safe and secure and applying this knowledge in practice (in policies, procedures, demeanor). This competency presupposes a general understanding of developmental stages in early childhood.*

   Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

   a) Stresses the need for children to have high self-esteem

   b) Understands the impact circumstances and the physical environment can have on children and others

   c) Organizes and structures the classroom to reduce stress on the adults and children

   d) Provides routines and rituals to promote children's emotional health and sense of well being

   e) Introduces children to new things gradually so that they are not fearful

   f) Presents new things to children in ways that appeal to them

   g) Makes sure that children who are distressed receive support and attention

2. SKILL IN CLASSROOM CONTROL AND DISCIPLINE

Definition: ***Understanding what behaviors adversely affect children and disrupt group harmony. Includes practical knowledge of what to do and say to redirect children's energy into constructive activities and more appropriate modes of expression. This competency presupposes a general understanding of developmental stages in early childhood.***

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Sets rules for children; lets them know what is expected; reminds them as necessary

b) Explains consequences of actions to children—what will happen if they do x, y, or z

c) Understands the strategies children use to manipulate others

d) Obtains compliance by telling children what to do rather than what not to do

e) Obtains compliance by narrowing children's options or range of choices in decision-making

f) Orients children's attention away from inappropriate behavior towards more appropriate behavior

g) Enlists the cooperation of children in dealing with issues and problems in the group

h) Works with children to help them verbalize and express their feelings appropriately

i) Shows approval; reinforces appropriate behavior

3. SKILL IN PROVIDING STIMULATION FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

Definition: ***Practical knowledge about how to capture the interest and attention of young children and artful execution of these ideas. Includes attention to and adjustments for individual or group differences. Attention is paid to physical as well as intellectual and emotional stimulation. Activities may be adapted from other sources or originally created by the teacher. This competency assumes a general understanding of developmental stages in early childhood.***

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Introduces children to new things; expands their horizons (new food, other cultures, etc.)

b) Assures that there is sufficient variety in activities to hold children's attention. (This is balanced with the provision of routines that promote a sense of stability and security.)

c) Provides physically stimulating activities for children

d) Creates opportunities for children to be creative and expressive

e) Makes special efforts on behalf of the children (special celebrations; special materials; etc.)

4. SKILL IN COMMUNICATING WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Definition: ***The ability to use multiple modes of expression to get one's point across to young children, and the ability to develop children's communication skills. This competency presupposes a general understanding of developmental stages in early childhood, especially understanding of how language and cognitive skills develop in early childhood.***

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Assures that explanations, rules, etc. given to children are at their level of understanding and not too complex

b) Makes a special effort to be highly verbal with children as a developmental strategy

c) Uses dramatic techniques and other creative approaches to get a point across

d) Uses voice modulation and body language to set a particular mood (calm, excitement, etc.)

e) Uses gestures and sign language to reinforce verbal messages

f) Models the behavior s/he expects from the child

Cognitive Competencies

5. OBSERVATIONAL SKILL

Definition: *The ability to focus one's attention on transactions in the environment and to recall details of these observations. The activity may be conscious scanning or subconscious awareness. The latter talent for focusing on a matter at hand while subconsciously monitoring the environment for signs of trouble has led some to say that good teachers have "eyes in the back of their head." In contemporary literature, good teachers are said to be "with it."*

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Continuously monitors the environment; alert to signs of trouble.

b) Observes individual children to identify their unique characteristics (such as preferences in toys, food, people)

c) Observes adults/teachers in interaction with children to determine what is effective and what is not

d) Observes the impact a child or group of children is having on others

6. PATTERN RECOGNITION

Definition: *Pattern recognition is the ability to make several discrete observations, recognize their interconnectedness, and correctly label the pattern. The ability to spot departures from typical patterns is also involved. For child care teachers, the content of pattern recognition is primarily human behavior and situations relating to child care.*

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Identifies trends or patterns in behavior over time

b) Notices discrepancies or departures from typical behavioral patterns

c) Detects similarities between past and present situations

7. DIAGNOSTIC SKILL

Definition: *The ability to evaluate observational data using frameworks relating to the norms and practices of early childhood development and to identify appropriate developmental strategies.*

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Assesses each child's status against developmental norms

b) Observes children over time to assess their progress towards developmental goals

c) Assures that materials and methods are developmentally appropriate for individual children and the group

d) Develops specific strategies to meet special individual needs of children (cognitive, affective, and physical)

e) Accurately labels observed behavioral patterns

f) Identifies causes for behavior, particularly atypical or abnormal behavior

g) Accurately predicts children's future behavior from interpretations of past behavior

h) Learns from concrete experience with children what works to help them

Management Competencies

8. BREADTH OF PERSPECTIVE

Definition: *The ability to detach oneself from the present situation in order to evaluate it, bringing into account the long term and broader context of issues.*

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Views issues and problems in the context of the big picture or broader picture

b) Has a long term perspective on the child; concerned that what he/she and others do will serve the child well over time

9. PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

Definition: *Taking responsibility for the direction of the child care program, including coaching of other teachers*

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Does detailed planning with the team (co-teachers) and assures consistency and coordination

b) Provides specific feedback to other teachers to correct a problem

c) Provides instruction to other teachers on what to do to improve their effectiveness

d) Does things to enhance the professional development of other teachers

10. BUILDING COOPERATIVE PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Definition: ***Assuring that the knowledge and assistance of multiple professional resources are brought to bear in helping children. Includes offering one's own knowledge and assistance to other professionals and informing or involving management personnel, as appropriate.***

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Offers help and support to fellow teachers

b) Values insights and suggestions of team members and other professionals

c) Provides information to and values dialogue with other professionals who are working with the children for other purposes (such as speech therapists; psychologists)

d) Keeps supervisor informed of important developments

11. BUILDING TRUST AND RAPPORT WITH FAMILIES

Definition: ***Respecting the needs of families for information, a sense of security about their child's care, and decision-making authority in important matters affecting their children. Includes treating family members as primary sources of information about the child.***

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Values parents' expertise; asks them for information and advice

b) Consults with parents to work out mutually agreeable goals for children

c) Finds out about children's home life and takes this information into account in planning and decision-making

d) Complies with parents' preferences for dealing with children; makes compromises when needed

e) Invites family members to share their concerns about the children

f) Calls special problems to the attention of parents, and refers parents to other professional resources as needed

g) Shares with parents specific suggestions on how they can help their children

h) Establishes on-going communications with parents

Self-Management Competencies

12. ABILITY TO MAINTAIN OWN EQUILIBRIUM

Definition: ***Ability to help oneself remain optimistic and to derive personal satisfaction from what one has been able to accomplish.***

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Sees the funny side of situations

b) Does things to reduce own stress

c) Accepts that children's development takes time and comes in small steps; is patient

d) Derives great satisfaction from each step a child takes developmentally

e) Derives satisfaction from parents' praise and approval

13. SETS LIMITS AND BOUNDARIES

Definition: ***Ability to keep one's own hopes and desires realistic and to manage the expectations others place upon the teachers and program so that they, too, are reasonable.***

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Clarifies to people/parents the program's limitations

b) Attempts to keep his/her role separate from the parents' role; puts professional limits on own role

c) Helps parents understand the teacher's role limitations (for example, the teacher is not a medical doctor or psychologist)

d) Provides full information to people so that they can make the decisions they have responsibility for making

e) Tackles large problems one step at a time; works first where success is most readily attained

14. SELF-AWARENESS AND DEVELOPMENT

Definition: *Understanding one's own values, needs, strengths and limitations, and working to improve one's professional capabilities.*

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Views self objectively, striving for insights on own emotions, needs, limitations, etc.

b) Takes action to develop own professional capabilities (attending conferences; reading; courses; studying fellow professionals)

c) Analyzes own mistakes and takes steps to assure they are not repeated

d) Seeks help and support of peers and other professionals as needed

Achievement Competencies

15. INITIATIVE

Definition: *Taking action before being told to do so or being forced into action by circumstances; being proactive rather than reactive.*

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Takes the lead in problem-solving; acts to prevent problems from becoming crises

b) Follows through on all aspects of problem solving; assures that "all fires are out"

c) Presses beyond superficial facts to get at underlying factors

d) Resourceful in obtaining materials and making do with minimal resources

16. JOB COMMITMENT

Definition: *Commitment to the child care profession and dedicated effort on behalf of the children in one's care.*

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Feels a sense of vocation or "calling" to child care

b) Promotes a strong, positive image for the child care profession; is disappointed when status or image problems arise

c) "Goes the extra mile"; puts forth extra effort on behalf of the children, their families and the program

d) Keeps striving toward goals over long periods of time, despite adversities

e) Understands and upholds agency SOPs and state laws

17. SELF-CONFIDENCE

Definition: *Belief in one's own capabilities and judgment and the ability to maintain self-esteem despite personal limitations.*

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Believes in his/her ability to help children overcome problems

b) Believes in the accuracy of his/her feelings or insights

c) Is comfortable discussing own strengths and limitations

Interpersonal Competencies

18. EMPATHY

Definition: *The ability to view a situation from another person or group's perspective and to understand their feelings.*

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Understands children's perspective—how they are seeing things; what they are thinking and feeling

b) Understands the perspective of parents—their concerns, needs, interests, etc.

19. NONVERBAL UNDERSTANDING

Definition: *The ability to accurately interpret information communicated in non-standard ways such as through body language, gestures, and tone of voice.*

Typical ways in which the competency is demonstrated:

a) Reads the hidden message in conversation

b) Interprets nonverbal messages from body language, gestures, tone of voice, etc.

APPENDIX D

Comparison of Competencies of Beginning and Advanced Teacher

	Competencies	Mean Score		Probability
		Beginning	Advanced	
Early Childhood Educational	* Creating a safe psychological environment	1.2	4.0	0.02
	Classroom control and discipline	2.1	3.8	0.40
	Providing stimulation for children	1.1	1.9	0.31
	Communicating with young children	1.6	2.3	0.46
Cognitive Skills	Observational skills	2.7	3.3	0.58
	Pattern recognition	2.8	3.9	0.28
	Diagnostic skills	2.9	4.9	0.19
Management Competencies	* Breadth of perspective	0.2	1.7	0.02
	** Program management	0.7	2.3	0.01
	* Builds cooperative professional relationships	1.1	3.0	0.02
	Builds trust and rapport with families	2.3	3.7	0.36
Self-Management Competencies	Ability to maintain own equilibrium	2.2	3.1	0.16
	Sets limits and boundaries	0.5	1.5	0.24
	Self-development	1.7	3.7	0.11
Achievement Competencies	* Initiative	0.9	2.4	0.04
	Job Commitment	1.3	2.7	0.10
	* Self-confidence	0.4	1.6	0.02
Interpersonal Competencies	* Empathy	1.7	3.8	0.05
	* Nonverbal understanding	0.2	1.5	0.03

* Significantly differentiates at 0.05 level.
** Significantly differentiates at 0.01 level.

Appendix E

Comparison of Competencies of Assistant and Head Teacher

	Competencies	Mean Score		Probability
		Assistant Teacher	Head Teacher	
Early Childhood Educational	Creating a safe psychological environment	1.5	3.8	0.08
	Classroom control and discipline	3.8	1.9	0.32
	Providing stimulation for children	1.6	1.4	0.75
	Communicating with young children	1.9	2.0	0.93
Cognitive Skills	Observational skills	3.5	2.4	0.41
	Pattern recognition	3.6	3.1	0.61
	Diagnostic skills	3.4	4.5	0.45
Management Competencies	Breadth of perspective	1.5	0.7	0.54
	Program management	1.3	1.8	0.41
	Builds cooperative professional relationships	2.0	2.1	0.92
	Builds trust and rapport with families	2.6	3.4	0.57
Self-Management Competencies	Ability to maintain own equilibrium	2.9	2.3	0.33
	Sets limits and boundaries	0.5	1.6	0.21
	Self-development	2.5	2.8	0.83
Achievement Competencies	Initiative	1.7	1.6	0.94
	Job Commitment	1.6	2.4	0.32
	Self-confidence	0.6	1.4	0.10
Interpersonal Competencies	Empathy	2.4	3.3	0.45
	Nonverbal understanding	0.6	1.2	0.34

Appendix F

Comparison of Competencies by Educational Level

	Competencies	Mean Score		Probability
		2 years college or less	4 years college or more	
Early Childhood Educational	Creating a safe psychological environment	1.3	3.0	0.23
	Classroom control and discipline	1.2	3.5	0.10
	Providing stimulation for children	2.0	1.3	0.48
	** Communicating with young children	0.5	2.4	0.01
Cognitive Skills	* Observational skills	1.3	3.5	0.02
	Pattern recognition	4.2	3.1	0.37
	Diagnostic skills	3.0	4.2	0.49
Management Competencies	Breadth of perspective	1.2	0.9	0.73
	Program management	1.3	1.6	0.69
	Builds cooperative professional relationships	1.2	2.3	0.25
	Builds trust and rapport with families	2.8	3.1	0.89
Self-Management Competencies	Ability to maintain own equilibrium	2.5	2.7	0.83
	Sets limits and boundaries	2.0	0.7	0.40
	Self-development	1.7	3.0	0.37
Achievement Competencies	Initiative	1.5	1.7	0.80
	Job Commitment	2.3	1.9	0.65
	Self-confidence	1.0	1.0	1.00
Interpersonal Competencies	Empathy	2.6	2.8	0.89
	Nonverbal understanding	1.2	0.8	0.57

* Significantly differentiates at 0.05 level.
** Significantly differentiates at 0.01 level.

Appendix G

Comparison of Competencies by Age Level of Students

	Competencies	Mean Score		
		Infant	Toddler	Preschool
Early Childhood Educational	Creating a safe psychological environment	1.67	3.33	2.44
	Classroom control and discipline	0.33	3.33	4.33
	Providing stimulation for children	1.33	2.11	1.00
	Communicating with young children	0.17	2.78	2.33
Cognitive Skills	Observational skills	1.00	4.00	3.33
	Pattern recognition	2.33	4.44	3.00
	Diagnostic skills	2.83	4.89	3.67
Management Competencies	Breadth of perspective	0.83	0.89	1.11
	Program management	1.00	2.00	1.44
	Builds cooperative professional relationships	1.33	2.11	2.44
	Builds trust and rapport with families	4.33	2.33	2.78
Self-Management Competencies	Ability to maintain own equilibrium	2.50	2.44	2.89
	Sets limits and boundaries	2.33	0.78	0.33
	Self-development	1.83	2.55	3.33
Achievement Competencies	Initiative	1.50	1.44	2.00
	Job Commitment	2.83	2.00	1.44
	Self-confidence	0.83	0.67	1.44
Interpersonal Competencies	Empathy	3.00	2.89	2.56
	Nonverbal understanding	0.83	0.89	0.89